

CHOICE

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**MIND
GAMES**

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sales tricks

317
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Airlines, lift your game

Small changes could make a big difference

If there's one thing Australians love to do that's been most affected by the pandemic in the past few years it has to be travel.

I have felt genuinely sorry for the way travel restrictions have hit many businesses, especially in regional communities. I remember visiting Cairns in mid-2021, seeing the dock area that would normally be buzzing with backpackers setting off on excursions to the reef, now completely deserted. And I remember the strain on the face of a local shop owner on the NSW south coast who had just emerged from a summer of bushfires to face almost a year of no tourists due to COVID.

But when it comes to some of our largest travel businesses, I'm sometimes less sympathetic. When, last November, we gave a Shonky Award to Qantas, it retorted that we had failed to take account of the impact of COVID on the aviation industry. That couldn't be farther from the truth.

In all of our work over the past few years, we've acknowledged that there are some things beyond a business's control. Our focus is on the things they can control to treat their customers fairly – and there's a lot more that our airlines could be doing.

First, they could be clear about the terms and conditions of a booking. In recent months I've booked flights with Qantas, Virgin and Jetstar, and none of the booking confirmations contained information on my refund rights if a flight had to be cancelled. Given how often flights continue to be cancelled, that information should be easy to find.

Second, they can make it easy to rebook when they cancel your flights. I've been able to use some of my flight credits in a few simple clicks online, but other attempts have involved hours in phone queues, sometimes across multiple calls. A credit represents money that you've already paid them, so they should make it easy to use.

Third, they can give fast refunds. Some airlines are still claiming they need up to eight weeks to process a refund. Given they can process a payment in less than a second, they need to do better when it comes to returning payment for a service they haven't provided.

Finally, they can avoid price gouging. Almost every week, I bump into somebody who's had to book or change a flight at the last minute and been astonished by the outrageous fares being demanded, especially



by Qantas. I accept that last-minute flights will often cost more, but when an airline is charging more than \$1000 one way from Sydney to Melbourne, it reeks of price gouging.

These suggestions all boil down to a few simple principles: transparency, fairness and care for customers. Surely that's not too much to ask.

Alan Kirkland, CEO
Email: alan@choice.com.au
Twitter: @AlanKirkland

CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Wherever possible, we pay full price for the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by membership. Memberships include online access and services such as CHOICE Help. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert

assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

BECOME A MEMBER To review the full range of membership options and benefits go to choice.com.au/signup.

MEMBERSHIPS/RENEWALS Call 1800 069 552 or email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.



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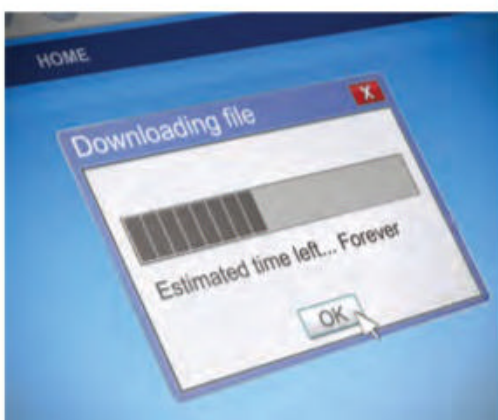
ROLLING
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CHOICE magazine provides a selection of our top product reviews. We can't always include all the models we've tested, but you'll always find the products that scored the best. To view complete results for all our tests, go to choice.com.au, or call Customer Service on 1800 069 552 to add full online access to your membership package.

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Shonky florist in court over misleading ads

One of last year's Shonky-winning companies has been taken to court by the ACCC over alleged misleading advertising and price representations.



Online florist Bloomex had proceedings brought against them in December by the Commission over star ratings on their website that were disingenuous and prices that were allegedly misleading. Bloomex won a Shonky Award last year after CHOICE mystery-shopped the company and found it didn't deliver on its promises (when it 'delivered' at all).

"We allege Bloomex's product star ratings were misleading because they were several years out of date and included the experiences of customers that had likely never purchased from Bloomex's Australian business," ACCC commissioner Liza Carver says.

"Online reviews and product ratings are an important tool that consumers rely on when making purchasing decisions. It is essential businesses ensure reviews are complete, accurate and current."

The ACCC also says the sale prices offered by Bloomex were misleading.

"This year we began a focus on misleading and deceptive online advertising and have been very concerned with what we have seen in the online florist industry. We are warning all online florists to make sure they are meeting their obligations under the Australian Consumer Law," Carver says.

JARNI BLAKKARLY

Uber admits to taking passengers for a ride

Rideshare giant Uber will have to pay a \$21 million fine after it admitted to the Federal Court it had engaged in misleading or deceptive conduct and made false or misleading representations to consumers.

The company made the admission during proceedings brought by the ACCC over messages it displayed on its app and website about cancellation fees and the price of Uber Taxi rides. Uber admitted a message seen by more than two million users, warning them they may still be charged a fee if they cancelled their ride, even during the free cancellation period, was misleading. It also agreed the price range estimate for an Uber Taxi ride (a service available only in Sydney until 2020) was false and misleading because it was usually higher than the actual fare.

The company conceded the false messages and statements may have convinced some users to not cancel their trip and prevented others from making informed decisions – something ACCC chair Gina Cass-Gottlieb says the regulator was fighting to address: “We took this important case because we understand that consumers rely on apps like Uber to provide accurate information to inform their purchasing decisions, because they cannot independently check or monitor whether the information displayed is accurate.”

LIAM KENNEDY



ACCC loses Google case

The Federal Court has dismissed a case against Google LLC (Google), brought by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), finding that Google did not mislead Australian consumers when it published an on-screen notification and changed its privacy policy to expand the scope of personal data collection and use.

The ACCC, who discovered the issue during its Digital Platforms Inquiry, alleged that Google didn’t adequately inform users of the changes or obtain explicit consent.

However, the Court found that the notification and the changes to the privacy policy were not misleading because Google sought the consent of account holders to implement the changes and only implemented the steps with their informed consent. The Court also noted that Google did not reduce account holders’ rights under the privacy policy. Federal Court Justice David Yates added that account holders who did not read the notification before giving their consent “would not have been acting reasonably in their own interests”.

ACCC deputy chair Delia Rickard says: “We took this case because we were concerned that Google was not adequately providing consumers with clear and transparent information about how it collects and uses consumer data. We will now carefully consider the judgment.”

The ACCC Digital Platforms Inquiry is ongoing.

KATE BOWER



BNPL regulation needed for high-risk borrowers

A first-of-its-kind study by the University of Sydney Business School has found that people with multiple buy now, pay later (BNPL) accounts are more likely to be high-risk borrowers. The study looked at 2021 borrowing data from over 800,000 BNPL users and found that 40% of those people had more than one account. Of those who had multiple accounts, they were more likely to be from a lower socio-economic area, be on government support payments, use credit cards at a higher rate and use more personal loans.

Sydney University associate professor Dr Andrew Grant says while most BNPL services report low rates of missed payments, the industry doesn't exist in a vacuum.

"My previous research has found people have a payment hierarchy, so when they experience financial stress they're more likely to default on a credit card or personal loan before a buy now, pay later service in order to keep a line of credit open," says Grant. "But these services have so far only existed in a low-interest rate environment in Australia. Now that interest rates are rising and inflation

is biting, we can expect to see more people experience financial difficulty in the year to come."

JARNI BLAKKARLY



Amex breaks design and distribution rules



In October 2021, new rules came into effect that said financial products couldn't be targeted toward the wrong people. They're called "design and distribution obligations" (or DDO), and in December last year ASIC took legal action against American Express Australia for allegedly violating them.

At issue are two Amex credit cards co-branded with retailer David Jones. As part of its DDO protocol, Amex was required to make a "target market determination" (or TMD) describing who the credit cards would be appropriate for and how they should be distributed. The company was also meant to make sure the TMD stayed up to date. But high cancellation rates for the David Jones cards and customer confusion about whether they were a credit or a loyalty card indicates the company fell short, ASIC says.

"Product providers must monitor and review whether consumers are receiving products consistent with their needs and cannot bring a set-and-forget mindset to product governance," says ASIC deputy chair Sarah Court.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



Vanguard caught greenwashing

ASIC recently issued three infringement notices to Vanguard Investments Australia for engaging in “greenwashing”. The regulator defines this as “the practice of misrepresenting the extent to which a financial product or investment strategy is environmentally friendly, sustainable or ethical”.

The problem was the product disclosure statement for one of Vanguard’s funds, which claimed to rule out investment in companies involved in significant tobacco sales. But the language was fuzzy, since the fund only screened out manufacturers of cigarettes and other tobacco products but not companies involved in the sale of tobacco products.

“Investors can feel strongly about not investing in tobacco production, manufacturing and sales, and where tobacco-exclusion investments are promoted, the entity making those claims must be able to substantiate the full exclusion of those investments,” says ASIC deputy chair Sarah Court. Vanguard paid \$39,960 in fines for failing to do so.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



Green claims a ‘vague promise’

According to a recent survey by the Consumer Policy Research Center (CPRC), almost half of Australians (45%) take a look at sustainability claims when making a purchase.

The same proportion assumes these green claims are independently verified. According to the CPRC, they are not.

The CPRC research also revealed that about half of consumers are concerned that the green claims (also known as green marketing or greenwashing) made by businesses ranging from energy retailers to superannuation funds might not be true.

With so many unsubstantiated green claims flying around, they can seem a lot like empty promises.

“Consumers should be able to trust that the sustainable claims they see are backed up with real environmental action but at the moment it’s too hard to tell a vague promise from a genuine commitment,” says CPRC CEO Erin Turner.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

IMAGES: GETTY



Bought a dud in the end-of-year sales?

Have you ever had to fight just to get a refund, repair or replacement when you knew you were entitled to one? Or have you been pushed into buying an extended warranty you knew you didn't need?

Right now, it's illegal for businesses to unfairly refuse a refund, repair or replacement on a faulty good or service for a reasonable period of time after purchase. These are your consumer guarantees. But did you know that there are no penalties when businesses break this law?

With cost-of-living pressures only getting worse, people don't need to be paying for extended warranties that often don't offer much more protection than you already get under the law. Instead, we need businesses to be held accountable when they break the law by refusing to honour your consumer guarantees.

Over 14,000 people have already signed the petition calling on the government to introduce tough penalties for businesses who break this law. Add your name now: choice.com.au/tougherpenalties.

BEA SHERWOOD



Historic payday lending reforms pass Parliament

After years of advocacy from consumer groups, the Australian Parliament has passed landmark legislation that protects people from high-cost payday lenders and consumer lease providers.

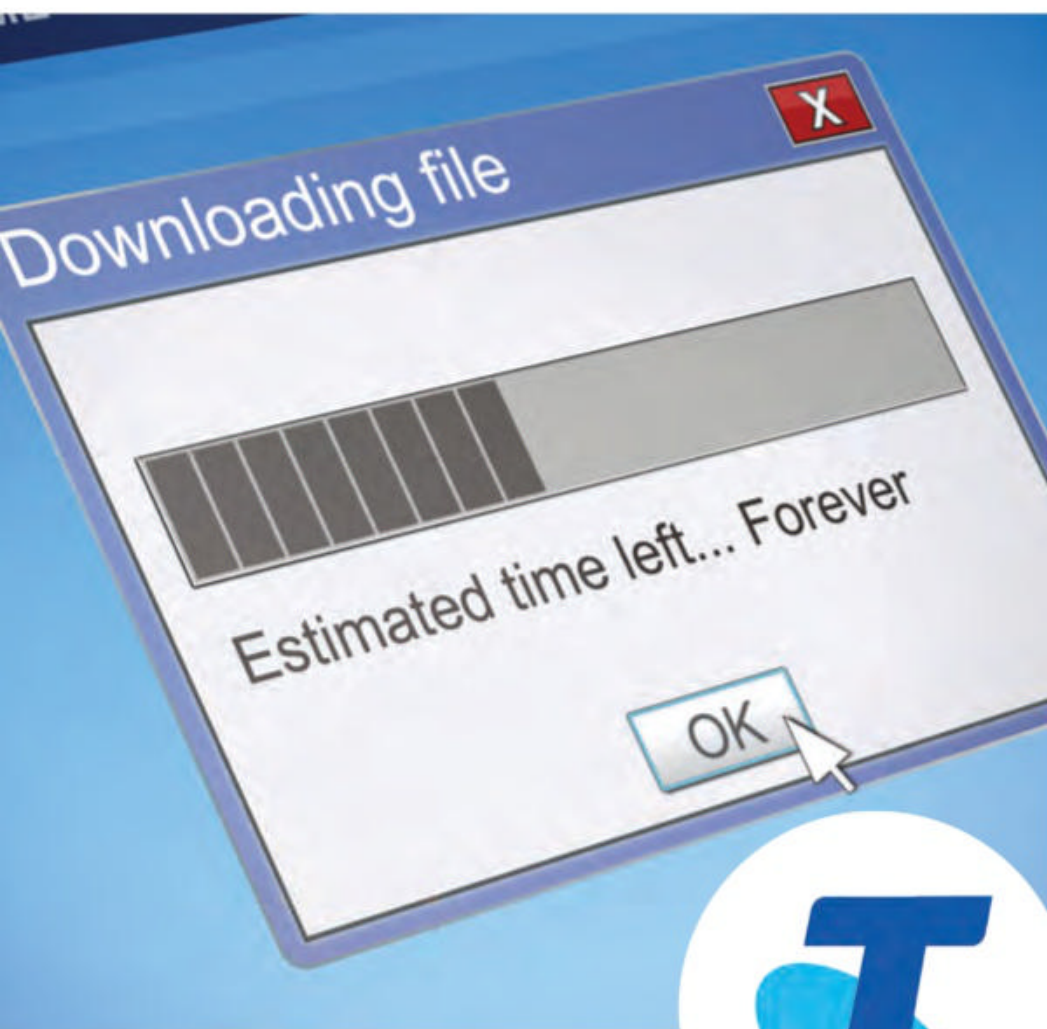
Consumer Action Law Centre CEO Gerard Brody says, "In the more than six years since we have been calling for these reforms, we have heard of the harm from thousands of Australian families needlessly pushed into debt by unaffordable payday loans or sold dodgy and expensive consumer leases."

Payday lenders can charge interest rates greater than 200% and regularly target people who are doing it tough. The new law places a cap on the amount that payday lenders can lend and bans the unsolicited marketing of these loans.

CHOICE is a member of the Stop the Debt Trap Alliance, a coalition of consumer and community sector organisations, which has called for reform to this predatory industry. CHOICE CEO Alan Kirkland says, "With many people struggling to meet rising costs of living, it's even more important to rein in rogue lenders that prey on people in financial hardship."

CHOICE will continue to fight for fairer financial protections for people, especially those struggling with rising cost-of-living pressures. To join our campaigns, visit choice.com.au/campaigns.

PATRICK VEYRET



Telstra in court for broadband speeds

The ACCC has begun legal action against Telstra for allegedly misleading customers about broadband speeds available on its cheaper brand Belong. Between October and November 2020 Telstra migrated almost 9000 customers on its Belong network to plans with lower upload speeds but failed to notify them of the reduced speeds, according to the regulator.

“We allege 8897 consumers who signed up to a Belong NBN plan between May 2017 and October 2020 were affected by this change and deprived of the opportunity to make an informed decision about their internet service,” ACCC commissioner Liza Carver says.

In March and April 2021, Telstra acknowledged this failure in respect of approximately 2500 customers and provided them with a one-off \$90 credit.

“We allege that more than 6300 Belong customers have still not been informed by Telstra that their plan has changed to a lower maximum upload speed, and that Telstra continues to represent to them that the Belong broadband service supplied to them has not been altered,” Carver says. “In these circumstances, we are seeking a Court order requiring Telstra to pay compensation to consumers who, we allege, did not get the service they signed up for.”

JARNI BLAKKARLY

Time to make insurance in super work for everyone

Nick Sherry, formerly Australia’s first superannuation minister, now Chair of transport industry super fund TWUSuper, says there may be a better way to offer disability insurance than the status quo, which is to bundle it with super.

“My argument is: let’s look at something better, stronger and more comprehensive outside super,” he tells Super Consumers Australia.

“I don’t say ‘remove it from super and do nothing’; I say ‘only remove it if we have something more comprehensive’.”

Super Consumers Australia has been calling on the government to find a solution that protects all Australians who become ill or injured and can no longer work and earn. This insurance can be a crucial source of income for people with a disability, but it’s an imperfect system. The results are calamitous when people pay for this cover but become unable to work and have their claim rejected.

We’ve previously shared stories from people who can’t work, but don’t get any payment from their insurance because of restrictive terms in their policies.

“We need to fix the system,” says Super Consumers Australia policy adviser Franco Morelli.

“It’s not fair to have a default insurance system that only works for some of us.”

DANIEL HERBORN



Water businesses have room to improve, say consumer advocates

Victorian consumer advocates have welcomed news of stable water prices in the state, but say water providers need to do more to get cost relief to customers who are eligible. Water businesses last year submitted their 2023–28 price proposals to Victoria’s Essential Services Commission, and Consumer Action Law Centre policy officer Alex Macafee says they contained good news for households.

“At this time of cost-of-living crisis, we’re very pleased to see falling or steady prices proposed by most water businesses,” says Macafee.

Consumer Action says it would now like to see utility providers invest more into their hardship programs and make sure customers who are eligible for water bill concessions receive them. “We want to see more from water businesses regarding what is currently working to support customers on hardship programs and what needs to work better, including support in accessing concessions,” Macafee says.

In 2022, the Consumer Policy Research Centre found 22% of Victorian water customers were not receiving concessions they were entitled to, despite regulations requiring water businesses to provide them with information about the help schemes.

LIAM KENNEDY



Cheapest Basic health insurance policies to save on tax

As rising living costs continue to put pressure on Australian household budgets, you may be thinking about downgrading your health insurance.

If you earn over \$90,000 (or \$180,000 for couples and families) and decide you don’t need health cover but want to avoid paying extra tax, a Basic policy may be an option for you.

Basic hospital insurance policies offer the lowest tier of health cover at the lowest price point. All Basic policies must cover treatment in a public hospital for palliative care, rehabilitation and psychiatric care.

These policies are good for avoiding tax and loadings, but we don’t recommend them for health cover. If you want a higher level of hospital cover, look for Bronze, Silver or Gold hospital insurance.

The cheapest Basic policies are:

- **NSW/ACT and Tas:** Frank Accident Only Hospital with a \$750 excess
- **Vic, NT and SA:** HCF Accident Only with a \$750 excess
- **Qld:** Westfund Basic with a \$750 excess
- **WA:** Bupa Accident Only with a \$750 excess.

UTA MIHM

Oxfam calls out ‘naughty’ fashion brands

ZARA JEANSWEST



International charity Oxfam has called out fashion brands Zara and Jeanswest for failing to transparently share factory locations and benchmark garment workers’ wages. The two brands were listed on the anti-poverty organisation’s ‘naughtiest’ list, which benchmarks brands doing well and poorly in terms of commitments to providing a living wage to workers.

Oxfam Australia chief executive Lyn Morgain says the retail clothing industry had recovered from the COVID pandemic, with revenue rising by 18% over two years, and profits at \$1 billion in the past year alone.

“Increased profits for shareholders must not come at the expense of those playing a key role in generating those profits,” says Morgain. “Brands should be factoring living wages into the cost of doing business. They are responsible for ensuring everybody in their supply chain, including the women who make their clothes, are paid above the living wage so they can help themselves and their families out of poverty.”

JARNI BLAKKARLY

Your 2022 campaign wins

2022 was a big year for consumer wins. Each time CHOICE supporters like you signed a petition, made a donation or answered a survey, you helped make our society more fair, safe and just for everyone.

Last year the hard-fought mandatory button battery standard came into effect to protect children from injury; Tinder backed down on age-based price discrimination; we got tougher penalties for companies that break a number of consumer laws; an investigation was launched into the use of facial recognition by Australian retailers; and new safety standards were introduced for tricycle strollers. And this is just to name a few of the wins!

From stronger consumer protections to holding shonky businesses to account, you made a real impact. So take a bow – you’ve earned it.

JORDAN CORNELIUS



Solar users urged to act quickly on battery fire risk

The ACCC is urging owners of LG solar batteries to check if their device is the subject of an expanded recall, as it works with the company to track down 3000 batteries at risk of catching fire.

The regulator is contacting almost 5000 households in an effort to recall the power storage units, which have caused injury and property damage in nine instances of combustion since 2019.

Even if your battery was not recalled previously, you must check [its] serial number again

“This recall has been updated twice to include new models, affected systems and dates of manufacture, so even if your battery was not recalled previously, you must check [its] serial number again,” says ACCC deputy chair Delia Rickard.

Consumers can use the serial number checker on the LG website to see if their system is included in the warning. Meanwhile, the ACCC is reaching out to consumers likely to have the devices, which may be branded LG, SolaX, Opal, Redback, Red Earth, Eguana, and Varta.



Anyone with a recalled battery is urged to keep it turned off and contact the manufacturer for a free replacement or a refund. LG is also providing financial compensation to customers who have higher electricity bills as a result of not being able to use their battery as expected.

LIAM KENNEDY

Harassment costs Debt Negotiators \$650K

Doing business with a debt-management or debt-consolidation firm is rarely a good idea. A far better idea is to call the National Debt Hotline on 1800 007 007 and speak with a free financial counsellor, who can often help debtors negotiate a manageable repayment schedule with their creditors. Debt management firms can also play rough, as ASIC’s recent case against A&M Group (trading as Debt Negotiators) demonstrates.

Late last year, Debt Negotiators was slapped with a \$650,000 penalty by the Federal Court following the ASIC

investigation, which found that the firm “engaged in misleading or deceptive conduct and in undue

harassment or coercion against debtors” who had missed payments under their debt agreements with the firm.

In keeping with the culture that seems to pervade this largely unregulated sector, Debt Negotiators told clients behind on payments that they could be sued and sent to jail, that their creditors were considering legal action, and that their wages could be garnisheed. The firm also threatened to contact clients’ friends, family and work colleagues “with the intention of embarrassing or intimidating the debtors” in order to get them to contact the firm, ASIC says.

“This type of unduly harassing or coercive behaviour by A&M was unacceptable and would have added to the difficulties and stress experienced by these consumers,” says ASIC deputy chair Sarah Court, adding that the regulator “will continue to take action to protect financially vulnerable consumers”.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN





RANTS AND RAVES



Tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies

I've been working as an investigative journalist with CHOICE for almost two years now and one of the biggest learning curves (along with getting my head around the details of Australian Consumer Law) has been understanding the way companies relate to the truth.

Prior to joining CHOICE, I worked at SBS News and I wrote primarily about the federal government on issues such as immigration, asylum seekers, refugees and politics.

Dealing with government departments and ministers' offices is like dealing with a slippery sponge – you ask direct questions, you look politicians straight in the eye, and say, 'Tell me, did this happen?' And how do they answer? They duck, they dodge and they weave, they give you long, convoluted replies to totally different questions than the one you asked; they give you half an answer, leaving out key information. They do everything they can to not tell you

what you want to know – but, here's the crucial bit, they don't tell you straight-out lies. Not usually, anyway.

Time and again while working at CHOICE, where the subject of my work is primarily companies behaving badly instead of governments, I have found that companies have no qualms about lying to my face.

Companies have been caught out using facial recognition cameras in their stores and have told the media, without missing a beat, that they

a bad light to the rest of the media. When you point out that they are lying to you, they either double down or just go silent. Either way, there is no hint of shame.

It was naïve of me to think, initially, that everyone must have some kind of ethical standard, or at least something resembling a vague relationship to the truth. I certainly don't think that any more. Every company claim or statement I hear is now taken with a grain of salt.

Their willingness to lie to the media and to consumers only highlights the need for strong, independent investigative journalism

weren't using them – only to later have to admit that, guess what? It was true – they were!

Companies have insisted that events didn't happen, when I've had proof that they did.

Companies have claimed we didn't email them to give them a chance to comment on a story, when I have the email chains to show otherwise.

Often these lies are told to protect themselves or to paint CHOICE in

These companies and their willingness to lie to the media and to everyday consumers only highlights the need for strong, independent investigative journalism that holds corporate power to account in Australia. Because, if we don't put in the time, effort and resources to watch and keep them accountable, who will?

JARNI BLAKKARLY

ASK THE EXPERTS

Got a niggling question our team can help with?



ASK US

Email your question to asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204. You can also tap into the 'brains trust' at www.choice.community.

Q I have just taken ownership of an old dog, and I am noticing that I am now suffering from an internal itchy throat and nose, which I think is because of the dog. I thought an air purifier might be something that will help keep the air cleaner for me. Do you review air purifiers for their ability to remove pet dander and smells?

A CHOICE expert Chris Barnes: We can't include pet dander and odours in our air purifier tests as they're too hard to simulate, but our general tests for dust and smoke removal should be a good indicator of performance in those respects. Pet



dander particles tend to be relatively large (for microscopic particles) and are likely to precipitate out of the air and end up on the floor or on furniture. But there'll be enough small dander particles that stay airborne to potentially be an irritant, and the other larger particles will go back into the air for a while too if the dust is disturbed. These can be captured by an air purifier, so using one may help reduce the dander problem and should help with the odour too. Regular dusting, vacuuming, mopping and so on will still be an important part of keeping the pet dander down to a minimum.

Q I flew with Qantas to Bali and my Samsonite suitcase had one of the wheels wrenched off by the time it arrived at Denpasar. The Qantas rep for baggage took photos and started a file and said it would be repaired once I got back to Australia. On the way out of Bali a Qantas check-in staff member also commented that it'll be taken care of in Australia, and even back in Canberra ground staff made the same comment. This did not turn out to be the case, as my claim was rejected and stonewalled by Qantas Customer Care. What are my rights in regards to having damaged luggage repaired by an airline?

A CHOICE travel expert Jodi Bird: The general guidance is that if it's an Australian airline and you believe they've contradicted their conditions of carriage, then you have cause for complaint to your state consumer affairs body (refer them to the specific terms of the contract that the airline has breached). If the airline has not breached their own conditions of carriage (the conditions for liability are limited),

or if it is not an Australian airline, your state consumer affairs body will be limited in what it can achieve and you're better off complaining on the airline's social media, presuming complaints to the airline have gone unheeded.

The Qantas conditions of carriage indicate they should accept liability for your damaged baggage. If Qantas has declined, then it seems they're in breach of their contract with you, in which case you should be able to raise a complaint with ACT Fair Trading. It might be worth giving Qantas a deadline to address your matter before you pursue compensation via the ACT Civil & Administrative Tribunal. In any correspondence, you should note that not only are they potentially in breach of section 60 of the Australian Consumer Law, but in breach of their own contract with reference to their baggage compensation section of their conditions of carriage.



Q I went to the David Jones website to order shorts for my husband. The sale showed the Sportscraft cargo shorts advertised at \$49.00, but when I chose the colour and size, the price changed to \$89.99. I tried other colours and sizes (some sizes not available) and the price stayed at \$89.99. So I don't know what was on sale for \$49! I questioned DJs Sportscraft over the phone and DJs online chat about this misleading information. Their answer was that some colours and sizes are at full price. The online chat person said the website says prices 'From \$49', therefore not all shorts are at the sale price. Can David Jones get away with this? Does this behaviour contravene Australian Consumer Law?

A CHOICE investigative journalist Andy Kollmorgen: When one of our team looked into this, like you, they could find no pair of shorts (in any colour or size combination) for the sale price, but later another team member found one item at the sale price. The ACCC website says that "businesses shouldn't try to gain an unfair advantage by making misleading claims about their products or services. It makes no difference whether a business intends to mislead or not." It also says that "any information or claim that a business provides about its products or services must be accurate, truthful and based on reasonable grounds ... This includes information on prices." It certainly looks to us like the \$49 sale price is a misleading claim if once you click through on the promotion, no combination of price or colour is available at the discounted price. David Jones should be removing the promotion from their website as soon as there are no items available at that price, even if it means they reinstate it if an item becomes available again.

CHOICE Help

Recharge your rights

CHOICE member Les had owned a Vax Blade 2 cordless vacuum cleaner for just over two years. It was a few months out of warranty when he found the lithium battery was no longer holding its charge, lasting only 10–15 minutes instead of 40 minutes.

He rang Vax to enquire about buying a new battery and was told they were no longer making the VX-80 model and that there were no spare parts available either. Les felt that getting just 28 months use out of a \$300 vacuum was unacceptable.

Les emailed Vax with his complaint about the poor longevity of the battery and, when he didn't hear back, wrote to us to ask if it was something he should persist with.

We advised Les that even though the vacuum cleaner was out of warranty, he may still be protected under the consumer guarantees of the Australian Consumer Law, which state that goods must be of acceptable quality for a "reasonable" period of time.

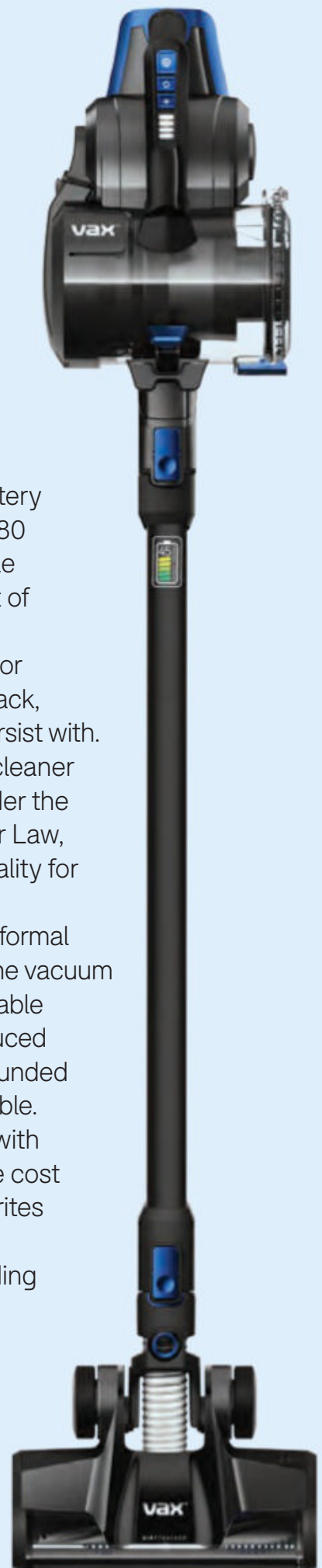
We suggested Les contact Vax once more via a formal complaint letter or email, stating that he believes the vacuum does not meet the consumer guarantee of 'acceptable quality' as it is not fit for purpose based on the reduced battery life, and that he would like it replaced or refunded as there are no longer spare parts (batteries) available.

Les followed our advice and Vax supplied him with an upgrade replacement model, also covering the cost of delivery. "Thanks to CHOICE, no doubt," Les writes to us. "Keep up the good work you do."

Postscript: Les had another query for us regarding the warranty for his new model. We reminded him that manufacturer warranties for replacement products usually only run from the start of the original product. So in his case, the new vacuum is unlikely to have a warranty attached. However, the replacement vacuum still needs to meet the consumer guarantees under the Australian Consumer Law.

CHOICE Help is our in-house advice service for CHOICE members. We'll arm you with the information and tools you need to tackle your consumer issue and help you work towards a solution.

CONTACT US at choice.com.au/choicehelp. ■



CHOICE

YOUR SAY

If you've had a bad experience, been ripped off or scammed, tell us and help other CHOICE members avoid the same traps. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

CONTACT US!

Email us at
yoursay@choice.com.au
 or write to Your Say,
 CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road,
 Marrickville, NSW 2204.



Long haul home

I was not surprised to read that Qantas had earned a 2022 Shonky Award, given my recent experience on returning from a holiday in the UK.

Singapore Airlines delivered me to Mascot late on a Friday afternoon in good time to catch a scheduled Qantas direct Sydney to Hobart flight. I received a text on arrival advising the flight was delayed, then another five minutes later saying it was cancelled. The Qantas service desk was struggling but managed to book me on flights via Melbourne the

following day. No explanation or apology for the cancellation was given and no assistance offered to find overnight accommodation, and no meal or taxi vouchers supplied. Finding accommodation late on a Friday night before the NRL grand final was another story.

I've done so many long-haul flights to the UK – I can understand that airlines worldwide are battling post-pandemic with staff, logistics, and equipment issues. But Qantas, once the quintessential Australian airline of choice of which Australians were justifiably proud, is not one I will ever fly with again.

The fallout for me involved a microscopically detailed claim on my travel insurance for one night's accommodation in Sydney (a \$365 room with bunk beds and a stainless steel toilet) and cab fares to and from the airport. If I ever get a payout the insurers will deduct a \$250 excess.

Qantas got \$2 billion of COVID assistance from the federal government, will rake in massive profits from the post-COVID travel explosion, and can still somehow afford millions in executive pay and bonuses. Despite their current rosy and cosy advertising about flying anytime anywhere, it's clear that their business model no longer respects its customers.

Andy Reid, Hobart, Tas



Over the years, I have bought many products from Brisbane-based company, Dreamfarm. Recently, after a few years' use, the stainless steel Chopula (combined chopping and spatula kitchen utensil) sheared off the handle while I was washing it. I sent a photo to see what I may

have done wrong, because I wanted to purchase another one, and they insisted on sending a new one free of charge. Also, my Garject (a garlic press that ejects the peel) was getting stiff. When I asked how to loosen it up, they insisted on also replacing it with a newer model! The package arrived with a lovely note from the Dreamfarm team – humans who really care about their products and their customers.

**Janet Roth,
 Sunshine Coast, Qld**



I recently purchased a new toaster when the old one stopped working. The new Breville Lift & Look has a large 'ring pull' plug, which is very convenient, especially for older, weaker hands. This should be a standard on all toasters and would prevent damage to plugs. It used to require a significant effort to pull out the plug from the power point.

Nancy Dixon, Taree, NSW





I have had a Flybuys card for a number of years and have earned points mostly through shopping at Coles, Shell petrol stations and Liquorland, and more recently also at Bunnings. I realised that I had more than \$100 sitting in my account from accumulated points. In the past I have had no problem redeeming points for 'Money off shop', but when I tried to redeem the points online I got a message: "Oops error. Please try again later".

Over the next month I tried many times online to redeem the points. I also tried phoning, but couldn't get through. I emailed Flybuys Member Help and got a reply after ten days with suggestions that didn't work. I tried downloading the Flybuys app onto my phone, but it appeared I would have to create a new account and risk losing the earned points from the existing card.

Amongst the online complaints about redeeming Flybuys points from other frustrated shoppers like myself, I found a comment that the phone app seems to be the only thing that works and that one needs to type in the existing card number to transfer the earned points. I did this successfully and was then finally able to redeem the points for cash back. But it has caused me and many others months of time-consuming and unnecessary stress.

Elizabeth Chisholm,
Kingston, ACT

CHOICE SOCIAL MEDIA

Join the conversation online. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and our own forum, CHOICE Community. This month: credit reports, butter love and more.

Community choice.community



Credit reports – do we have enough control to prevent fraud?

@mark_m: The short reply is no we do not. The evidence: The promotion to consumers of paid monthly protection schemes and insurance. Who are consumers being asked to pay? The credit reporting agencies who are supposedly in control of our credit information.

@person: I would say no. The system operates for the benefit of parties other than the people whose data is in the system. I would question fundamentally who gave these companies the right to record data about me. I see very little political will to make a major shift in data ownership though.

@postulative: I have no recollection of approving the collection of my personal information by a company with which I have absolutely no business for the on-sale to whomever could be bothered to pay for that personal information.

Facebook @choiceaustralia



What foods are improved with the addition of butter?

Jenni R: Teddy Bear biscuits.

Ashleigh C: Vegemite and butter on 'cheap' white toast!

Ginny S: An indulgent addition to an already delicious creamy soup... the icing on the cake!

Twitter @choiceaustralia



Will you be shopping in the sales this year?

@Aerohaveno: God no.

I have too much stuff already.

@cath_oco: I had my experience of having my hair pulled at a specials bin of kids' clothes at a sale 50 years ago. Have avoided sales ever since.

@MendItAussie: We rarely shop at any time. We prefer to get free stuff that others have discarded. A working Kenwood slow cooker was handed up to us. It has replaced our vintage orange Monier, rescued from an e-waste skip years ago. We've saved tens of thousands of dollars by not shopping.

Instagram @choiceaustralia



Are extended warranties worth it?

@dazpic70: No

@casperboreanaz: Why is it legal that they can even sell this crap?

@jakmalcolm77: We never let retailers talk us into extended warranties. Just say no as soon as they're mentioned. ■





NEED TO KNOW

- If your flight is cancelled by the airline, you should be entitled to a refund from Qantas and Virgin.
- Jetstar will offer credits if they've cancelled a flight, but may offer refunds under limited circumstances.

Best laid plans

What happens to your flights if COVID interrupts your travel plans?

Jodi Bird has the latest guidance from the major Australian airlines

Domestic and international travel is now back on the schedule for many Australians, but there are still concerns around how COVID-19 might affect travel plans.

Rebookings and credit vouchers may be offered for cancelled flights, and refunds may be available if you ask. But it varies between airlines and depends on the type of fare you bought.

Read your airline's conditions of carriage to find out if you're eligible. In fact, be prepared to quote these conditions back to the airline because they won't always offer you a refund if you don't ask.

If you booked through a travel agent or online booking site, you may need to process bookings or refunds through them – they should be able to tell you how to do this.



REFUNDS

If Qantas cancels your flight, they'll contact you to rebook you on the next available flight, or you can choose a credit or refund. Qantas advises their current processing time for refunds is eight weeks.

If you opted for a credit instead of a refund for a Qantas-cancelled flight,

you can still request a refund before you use the credit or before it expires.

We still receive reports of long call wait times with Qantas. The best time to call is first thing in the morning, and avoid phoning on Mondays or Fridays if you can. Be prepared to quote Qantas' conditions of carriage to claim a refund.

FLIGHT CREDITS

The rules around credit vouchers differ depending on whether Qantas cancelled your flight, or you did.

If Qantas cancelled your flight and you took a credit instead of a refund:

- Flight credits for Qantas cancelled flights can be used across multiple bookings.

- Credits issued before 1 August 2022 are valid for travel until 31 December 2023.
- Credits issued from 1 August 2022 are valid for 12 months.

If you cancelled your flight and received a flight credit:

- Credits issued before 1 October 2022 are valid for travel until 31 December 2023 and can be used for multiple bookings.
- Credits issued from 1 October 2022 are valid for 12 months and can only be used on fares of equal or higher value.

COVID

If you or anyone in your booking test positive to COVID-19 in the week before you fly, Qantas advises that you contact them or your travel agent to “discuss your options”.



REFUNDS

Virgin says if they need to cancel your flight and can't offer you a suitable alternative, you can ask for a credit or refund.

However, they also say they can't refund cancelled flights for bookings made on or before 20 April 2020, when the company entered voluntary administration (it was later sold and is operational again). These passengers can instead claim a Future Flight Credit.

FLIGHT CREDITS

Rules differ depending on whether Virgin cancelled your flight, or you did.

Flights cancelled by Virgin:

- For flights booked before 21 April 2020 that were cancelled, you may have a 'Future flight credit', which is valid for travel until 31 December 2023 and can be used on multiple bookings.
- 'Standard credits' issued for flights cancelled from 21 April 2020 that were due to expire before

30 January 2023 can now be used to make a booking before 31 January 2023, for travel until 27 December 2023.

- Otherwise 'standard credits' are valid for 12 months.

Flights cancelled by you:

- Credits are available as per normal fare rules. That is, you'll need to have paid more for a flexible fare.

COVID

If in the week before you travel you are required to isolate because you're deemed a close contact, or you test positive to COVID-19, you can change the date of your travel without incurring a change fee (you may have to pay more for higher fares).

There is no jurisdiction in Australia that requires you to isolate due to COVID-19 at present, in which case Virgin says you're subject to the rules of the ticket you booked.



REFUNDS

Jetstar's conditions of carriage says that for events beyond their control, if they're unable to put you on an alternative flight, they'll give you a flight credit.

If Jetstar cancels flights for reasons within their control and they're not able to provide you an alternative, cash refunds are available.

FLIGHT CREDITS

Rules differ depending on whether Jetstar cancelled your flight or you did.

Credit for Jetstar-cancelled flights:

- Credit vouchers for flights 'impacted by COVID-19', that were due to expire 31 December 2022, can now be used for travel until 31 December 2023 and can be used on multiple bookings.
- Otherwise flights that were 'impacted by COVID-19' before 1 August 2022 are valid for 18 months.

'Flexible flying' for flights cancelled by you:

- Fee-free flight changes are available for international flights booked by 30 June 2022, for travel before 31 August 2023.
- Fee-free flight changes are available for domestic flights booked by 30 April 2022, for travel before 31 August 2023.
- You'll need to cover any fare difference for a new booking.

COVID

If in the week before travel you test positive to COVID-19 or you're a close contact, Jetstar advises you to defer your travel and contact them via 'Live Chat' (online chat) to discuss your options. ■

Can you exchange flight credits for a refund?

Full-service airlines such as Qantas offer refunds if they've cancelled a flight, but many people may have opted for a credit voucher without knowing this. The ACCC says it received hundreds of complaints from people in this situation, and that in a lot of Qantas' communications, people weren't informed about their right to a refund.

Many credits issued during travel lockdowns will expire before the end of 2023, and there are reports of airlines charging higher flight prices if you're trying to claim a travel credit.

If you elected to receive a credit from your airline when you were entitled to a refund, you could contact your airline and ask them to give you a refund instead if you'd prefer.



Hazards ahead

Car rental contracts are a bad road of potholes, mudslides and cliff drops.
Jodi Bird helps you navigate the treacherous journey



NEED TO KNOW

- The biggest car hire trap is the extra payments to avoid liability for damage.
- Some car rental companies have hidden clauses to charge your card long after the rental period ends.
- None of the major car rental companies are recommended in our review.

As flight prices skyrocket, car rental may become a more popular option for travelling within Australia. But the pitfalls of hiring a car are much the same as they've always been, so take care to steer carefully around the potholes.

Fee burn

Fees and charges are the sting in the tail with car rental. The scorpion sting is often the collision damage waiver (CDW, sometimes called a loss damage waiver or an excess). All of the companies we reviewed now hire cars with their 'basic' CDW. But with the basic CDW, your liability ranges from \$4950 to \$5500, so you could be hit with a cost equivalent to that

of a used car (admittedly not a very good one at today's used car prices).

Faced with that level of risk, many people will opt to pay a higher CDW to reduce their liability. There's a lot of variance in what this may cost. We found that for the cheapest vehicle, you could pay a CDW of an extra \$31 a day to reduce the liability to \$850, through to \$86 a day to reduce your liability further, and get cover for windscreen, tyres and roadside assist.

Collision damage exclusions

Windscreens and tyres are commonly excluded in the base hire car cost, and even with the lower CDW options. So if you don't pay the higher level CDW, you may have to pay the full repair cost for windscreens and tyres.

As for roadside assist, you could be forgiven for thinking if you pay money to hire a car, the hire car company should be liable for ensuring that car actually works for you. But in most cases if there's a problem with your vehicle, you'll have to pay for the privilege of roadside assistance to help you out.

We've looked into alternatives to paying the CDW in the past, and found that getting external cover, either through your travel insurance or a third-party provider, can save you a lot on car rental. Visit **choice.com.au/carhireexcess** for more detail.



Daylight scratches

Check with your car rental company what will and won't pass for a scratch. Small scratches on your vehicle may be passable, but some car rental companies may define small as as little as three millimetres. You won't see scratches that insignificant if you're returning your car at night or to a dim spot in a car park at the airport. So, if you can, look your rental car over in the daylight when you pick up and drop off.

Never-ending charges

Some car hire companies may charge your credit card long after you've returned it. Hertz and Thrifty state they may charge your card 60 days after the rental. Europcar says 'charges may be made at any time during or after the end of the rental period'.

Some CHOICE members have shared with us their experiences of this.

Mandy advises to look out for international fee charges and ghost upgrades:

"I recently purchased car hire online. I thought I was hiring directly from Avis at Mackay airport, but discovered later when I was hit by an international fee charge, that it was via a company in Britain!

"Then to add pain to the whole transaction, on checking my debits on return discovered they had added another charge of \$49, after my return. A phone call did not clarify, other than to suggest it might have been a charge for an "upgrade", something that was never offered me, and for which I was pretty insulted as I got an even smaller and more basic brand than the small Corolla I had nominated.

"They said they would ring me back within two days. I saw a reversal of the fee a day later, but no phone call eventuated, and no apology. It seems they can do whatever they like, and only respond if there's a complaint."

Paul points out the importance of keeping a copy of the car's condition report, long after you've returned the car:

"Some years ago we rented a Europcar minibus in the UK. It broke down and Europcar offered us another minibus which, on checking, had a punctured spare. We took it anyway as we needed only about another three hours to Heathrow. The checkers there noted the puncture on the list, which I kept.

"About three months later we were charged around £170, which on enquiry turned out to be damage to spare tyre and wheel. We wrote to their office in Welwyn with a copy of the check-in sheet. They ignored everything.

"Remembering advice from consumer groups like you I wrote to the chairman of the board of Europcar in Paris, and had it translated into good French. I copied it to the people in Welwyn (in French). I got my money back shortly afterwards."

Electric vehicles

Of the six companies we reviewed, just Europcar, Hertz and Sixt rent out electric vehicles (EVs). But all six do have hybrid vehicles. Europcar also

has CO₂ emissions data available so you can pick the vehicle with the lowest environmental impact.

More than 60% of transport emissions in Australia come from light vehicles, so renting an electric or hybrid vehicle can go a long way towards reducing emissions, not to mention your fuel costs.

You may also find an added convenience at the end of the rental period. Car rental companies require you to return cars with a full tank of petrol if you want to avoid their exorbitant refuelling costs. But in our research, at least one company (Sixt) doesn't require that you return an electric/hybrid car with the battery fully charged.

Off-road rentals

There are currently only a few electric cars in Australia that are truly capable for off-road use, and they're prohibitively expensive. And most of us with off-road vehicles may only take them off road a couple of times a year.

So if you like off-roading but you also want to save on fuel, owning an EV and renting a four-wheel drive for driving holidays may seem a viable work-around. But unfortunately the six major car hire companies we reviewed have restrictions on where you can actually take a four-wheel drive, so you may have to seek out small specialist car rental companies if you're going down this route. ►



How we test car rentals

CONTRACT SCORE

The contract accounts for 70% of the CHOICE Expert Rating.

This score is based on the level of detail in the rental car contract, the amount of information provided, and whether it's delivered in language that's easy for the average consumer to understand.

When assessing contracts, we look at:

- ease of locating a complete copy of the rental contract on the website (rather than an abbreviated version)
- ease of understanding the contract, including layout, length and terminology used
- whether the rental company explains that their coverage is not the same as typical car insurance
- whether the company details pre- and post-rental inspection processes in the contract
- whether the contract clearly explains the length of time after the rental that damage or other charges can be made to the renter's credit card
- if the contract mentions rules for unfair contract terms per the Australian Consumer Law
- other admin and usage specifications.

EASE OF USE SCORE

Ease of use accounts for 30% of the CHOICE Expert Rating.

We go through all the steps required to book a vehicle via a web browser, on desktop and mobile devices. We don't assess a company's app because, regular customers aside, it seems unlikely



that potential customers would download and install an app to book a vehicle when the service is also available through web browsers.

When assessing ease of use, we look at:

- entering a pickup location and rental details (duration, age, country of residence etc.)
- selecting a vehicle type and model
- the supplied information and level of detail
- the degree to which prices change from the advertised cost to the final payment (e.g. hidden fees or extras)
- payment options
- other available features such as member bonuses, flight information and discount codes.

COLLISION DAMAGE WAIVER

Car rental companies don't provide a lot of information about their collision damage waiver (CDW, sometimes called a loss damage waiver or an excess), so we haven't scored it, but we have provided information for you to compare the typical level of cover for the car rental company's cheapest available rental.

When assessing this, we look at:

- specific mention of parts likely to be damaged, such as tyres, lights and windscreen
- specific mention of damage scenarios, such as single or multiple vehicle accidents or contaminated fuel and whether towing is covered
- specific mention of damage caused by natural disasters
- specific mention of loss or theft
- specific mention of underbody and overhead damage cover
- any additional coverage options.



We struggled to find a standout car hire company among the majors



Why we don't recommend any car hire services

You don't need to look far to find car rental horror stories. Damaged vehicles, dodgy contracts, outrageous additional fees billed to the driver once the car has been returned – these sorts of stories pop up in the news and on social media all the time.

All the companies we reviewed had several aspects that could be improved, whether it was an annoying booking process on mobile, right through to poor coverage for damage meaning renters could be left with hefty bills.

As a result, we struggled to find a standout car hire company among the majors. We also continue to hear negative feedback about car hire companies from our members, usually directed at individual outlets or staff members.

All this meant that we could not recommend any car rental services. However, people continue to need to hire cars, so we assess these services for performance and usability on the grounds that many CHOICE members will likely rent a vehicle at some point in the near future. ■

TABLE NOTES CHOICE Expert Rating Made up of contract score (70%) and ease of use score (30%).
* Regional restrictions means the company limits where you can take the vehicle. (A) Varies by vehicle.

	PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS									
	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Contract score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Electric vehicles available	Hybrid vehicles available	Minimum renter age	Credit card charge period after return	4WD vehicle can be used on unsealed road*	Optional snow cover	Optional roadside assist	Basic collision damage waiver (CDW) – cheapest vehicle (\$)	Additional collision damage waiver (CDW) – cheapest vehicle	Additional comments
Sixt Car Rental	53	40	83	✓	✓	21	60 days (in most cases)	Only vehicles with a transfer case with independent high and low range and all-terrain tyres; regional restrictions	✓	✓	4950	• \$880 CDW for \$31/day through to \$0 CDW for \$40/day • Roadside assist for \$7/day	• Has the shortest rental information and T&Cs documentation • Makes it clear that renters should conduct a pre-rental inspection for damage • Website was easiest to use/navigate of those tested • Additional cover options easy to understand • Additional cleaning fees not quantified • Doesn't make it clear that renters should conduct a post-rental inspection for damage
Thrifty Car Rental	51	58	33		✓	21	60 days	Regional restrictions			5500	• \$850 CDW for \$31/day through to \$0 CDW for \$40/day	• Makes it clear that the CDW/LDW is not comparable to comprehensive car insurance • Makes it clear that renters should conduct a pre-rental inspection for damage • Additional cover options easy to understand • Toll admin fee not quantified • Additional cleaning fees not quantified • Doesn't make it clear that renters should conduct a post-rental inspection for damage
Hertz Car Rental	49	55	34	✓	✓	(A)	60 days	Regional restrictions		✓	5500	• \$0 CDW for \$40/day includes cover for glass, tyres • Roadside assist for \$3/day	• Makes it clear that the CDW/LDW is not comparable to comprehensive car insurance • Makes it clear that renters should conduct a pre-rental inspection for damage • Toll admin fee not quantified • Additional cleaning fees not quantified • Doesn't make it clear that renters should conduct a post-rental inspection for damage • Additional cover options difficult to understand/compare • 'Adventurous Things' cover option does not specify inclusions
Europcar Car Rental	31	36	18	✓	✓	(A)	No limit	Additional charges and regional restrictions	✓	✓	5500	• \$1100 CDW for \$62/day through to \$0 CDW for \$74/day; includes cover for windscreen, glass, lights, tyres • Roadside assist for \$9/day	• Makes it clear that renters should conduct both a pre-rental and post-rental inspection for damage • Additional cover options easy to understand • Additional cleaning fees not quantified • Website was the least easy to use/navigate of those tested
Budget Car Rental	22	19	29		✓	21	ns	Regional restrictions	✓	✓	5445	• \$838 CDW for \$45/day through to \$71/day; includes cover for windscreen, tyres, roadside assist • Cost for \$0 CDW not stated	• Doesn't make it clear that renters should conduct both a pre-rental and post-rental inspection for damage
Avis Car Rental	21	19	24		✓	21	ns	Regional restrictions	✓	✓	5445	• \$838 CDW for \$45/day through to \$86/day; includes cover for windscreen, tyres, roadside assist • Cost for \$0 CDW not stated	• Doesn't make it clear that renters should conduct both a pre-rental and post-rental inspection for damage

IMAGE: GETTY



NEED TO KNOW

- A travel money card can be convenient for frequent travellers.
- Travel money cards can also have fees and hefty exchange rate margins.
- They're not a good choice for a short trip.

Pick a card

A prepaid travel money card is a convenient way to access cash and make purchases in the local currency, says **Uta Mihm**

Prepaid travel money cards are offered by major banks, airlines and foreign exchange retailers. Before travelling overseas, you load money into the card account, locking in the exchange rate for foreign currencies at that time.

You can then use the card for purchases and cash withdrawals just like a debit or credit card, usually wherever Visa and Mastercard are accepted.

You can reload money on-the-go via an app or website. If the card is lost or stolen it can be replaced, usually at no cost to you.

Some costs aren't apparent immediately, such as hefty margins built into the exchange rates

Prepaid travel money cards also give you assurance that you're not handing the details of your everyday banking account to merchants you're not familiar with, and they provide easy access to cash when you want some, says Peter Marshall, head of research at money comparison site Mozo. Travel money cards are best for longer trips. They're usually not worth it if you're only taking a short trip, as some have closure, cash-out and inactivity fees.

A major difference between prepaid travel cards and debit or credit cards is their fees. Some costs aren't apparent immediately, such as hefty margins

built into the exchange rates. Watch out for:

- fees to load the card – either a percentage of the total or a flat fee
- ATM withdrawal fees
- a cross currency fee or margin when you use the card in a currency you haven't preloaded
- further fees if you close the account or haven't used the card for a period of time.

Lowest fees and best exchange rate

WESTPAC WORLDWIDE WALLET

Westpac closed its Global Currency Card in July 2021 and offers its new card in partnership with Mastercard.

Currencies: AUD, USD, NZD, EUR, GBP, SGD, THB, JPY, HKD, CAD, ZAR.

Key features:

- No loading, reloading, closing or inactivity fees.
- Free to use network ATMs in Australia, and partner ATMs overseas in a range of countries including the UK, US and New Zealand.
- Fee for using non-Westpac and partner ATMs in Australia and overseas.
- Best exchange rates for the US dollar, the Euro and GBP.*
- This is the only card that lets you preload the South African rand.

**Other travel money cards****AUSTRALIA POST TRAVEL PLATINUM MASTERCARD**

Available online or at post offices.

Fees: Fee to reload the card via BPay, debit card or instore, but free via online bank transfer. Fees for ATM withdrawals in Australia and overseas. Closure fee.

Currencies: AUD, USD, NZD, EUR, GBP, SGD, THB, JPY, HKD, CAD, AED.

CASH PASSPORT PLATINUM MASTERCARD

Issued by Heritage Bank and available online and from a number of smaller banks, credit unions and travel agents.

Currencies: AUD, USD, NZD, EUR, GBP, SGD, THB, HKD, CAD, JPY, AED.

Fees: Fee to reload with a debit card or instore, but free via online bank transfer. Fees for ATM withdrawals in Australia and overseas.

COMMBANK TRAVEL MONEY CARD (VISA)

This card has the largest variety of currencies that can be preloaded.

Currencies: AUD, USD, NZD, EUR, GBP, SGD, THB, JPY, HKD, CAD, AED, VND, CNY.

Fees: Fee if you make a purchase with currencies not preloaded, and for withdrawals at overseas ATMs.

QANTAS TRAVEL MONEY (MASTERCARD)

A feature of the Qantas Frequent Flyer card, so you don't need a dedicated card and you can earn points using it.

Currencies: AUD, USD, NZD, EUR, GBP, SGD, THB, JPY, HKD, CAD, AED, VND, CNY.

Fees: Free reload via bank transfer or BPay; reload fee if using debit card. Fees for overseas ATM withdrawal.

TRAVELEX MONEY CARD (MASTERCARD)

Travelex is a foreign exchange retailer with more than 140 stores at major airports and shopping centres, across CBDs and in the suburbs. It had the best exchange rate for \$NZ.*

Currencies: AUD, USD, NZD, EUR, GBP, SGD, THB, JPY, HKD, CAD.



Fees: Reload fee instore or via BPay; free reload via online bank transfer. Closure fee and monthly inactivity (if not used for 12 months).

TRAVEL MONEY OZ CURRENCY PASS (MASTERCARD)

The Travel Money Group is owned by Flight Centre and is a foreign exchange retailer.

Currencies: AUD, USD, NZD, EUR, GBP, SGD, THB, JPY, HKD, CAD.

Fees: Reload fee if using debit or credit card and BPay; free reload via online bank transfer. Cash out (closure) fee. ATM withdrawal fee in Australia and overseas.

* Source: mozo.com.au; rates checked for \$3000, 5 December 2022.

Travel money card tips

- Make sure the card allows the currencies you'll need, and also consider stopovers. The South African rand is only supported by the Westpac card, and the Chinese yuan and Vietnamese dong is only available on the Commbank card.
- Try to load your card on days with good exchange rates.
- Make sure you know how to reload your card if you run out of funds while overseas.
- It may be more convenient to choose a card that has an app that can be linked to your bank account.
- Avoid loading more than you'll need as there may be fees and

exchange rate margins to get the unused money back.

- Remember to cancel the card once you're finished your trip, especially if it has inactivity fees.
- Be mindful that you still may need a credit card, as travel money cards may not be accepted as security for hotels and car rental agencies. ■





Traps to avoid

Planning a holiday? **Pru Engel** gets our experts' tips to help you avoid making a costly mistake with your travel insurance

It's been a rough few years for people wanting to travel overseas, but now international travel is well and truly back on the cards for many of us.

With COVID throwing all sorts of complications into the mix, on top of the general confusion people often have around travel insurance, it's more important than ever to understand what you're covered for if you're preparing to fly overseas in 2023.

Our travel insurance experts share some of the most costly travel insurance traps to avoid, plus things to be mindful of when buying a policy for your next trip.

1 Not getting cover in the first place

It would be remiss of us to not start with saying that getting travel insurance is a must if you're travelling overseas – it's just as important as your passport!

You could be left with medical bills that stretch into hundreds or thousands of dollars

Research by Smartraveller shows that 68% of travellers mistakenly believe the Australian Government would ensure they get medical treatment if needed overseas. The reality is that if you end up injured or sick overseas and you're not covered by travel insurance, you could be left with medical bills that stretch into hundreds or thousands of dollars. Not to mention the expense and

NEED TO KNOW

- It can be tricky to know exactly what your travel insurance policy does and doesn't cover.
- The most important tip is to get insurance in the first place. The next most important is to make sure you're covered for COVID-related medical costs.
- Shop around for the best price, and make sure you understand the fine print.

inconvenience if there are delays or cancellations to your trip, or your luggage is lost or stolen.

When it comes to travel within Australia, most of us already have medical cover (Medicare or private health insurance). So the main reasons for considering domestic travel insurance are for cancellation and baggage cover. And if you're hiring a car, you can save money using travel insurance to cover your collision damage excess, rather than paying the car hire company's extra charge.

2 Assuming you're covered for all things COVID-related

With COVID-19 now a constant cloud hovering over our travel plans, many travellers are looking for insurance that covers them for cancellation and medical expenses caused by the virus.

CHOICE travel insurance expert Jodi Bird warns not to get caught out with poor cover in the event you catch COVID.

"It's a good idea to understand how your insurance coverage applies to any travel disruptions or medical expenses associated with COVID-19, such as if you become sick and are unable to travel, either before you leave home or while at your destination," he says.

"The available cover varies quite a lot between insurers. Some policies only cover medical and repatriation costs if you get COVID-19 overseas, while other policies provide limited cover for cancellation costs in addition to medical and repatriation costs."

Reading the fine print in your product disclosure statement (PDS) is vital. You can review policies that offer

COVID-19 cover to see which offers you the best value in our travel insurance comparison, p29.

3 Not telling your insurer about pre-existing medical conditions

Skimming through a travel insurance application form without ticking a box about your existing medical conditions could be a very costly mistake.

If you have any medical condition, even something as common as allergies or asthma or as serious as a heart condition, you must declare it if you want to be covered. If you don't, your insurer could deny any claims you make down the track that they see as being related to a condition you had within a certain period of time before you travelled.

"Insurance cover for pre-existing medical conditions varies widely and it can be expensive and frustrating to get

cover if you have certain conditions, but in all cases, if you don't declare you have a condition, it could cost you later on," says Bird.

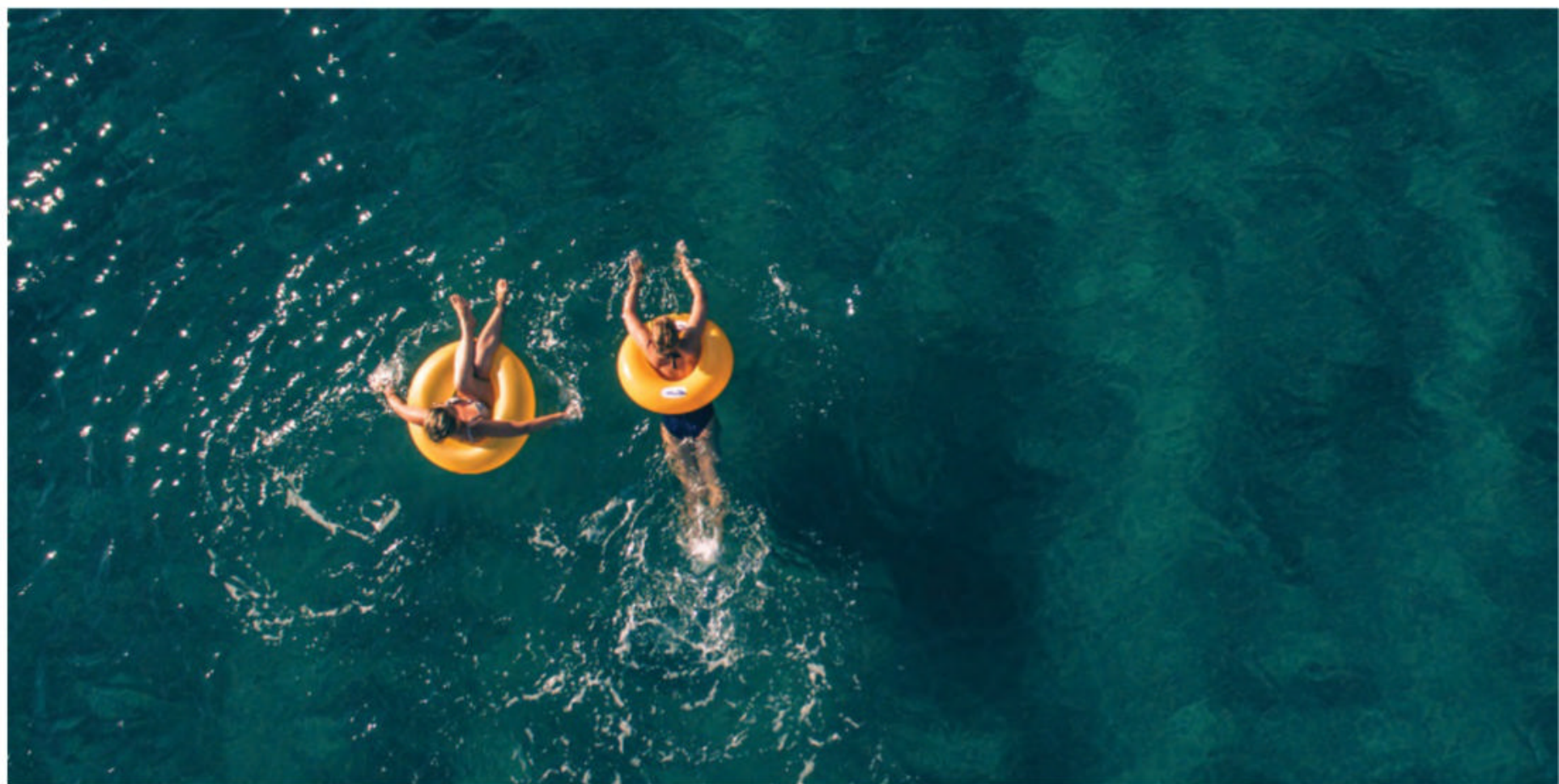
Smartraveller research found that more than two in three people (67%) may not have travel insurance for their condition, which is a risk that's just not worth taking.

"Check the insurer's PDS for a specific list of conditions. If a condition is not listed as automatically covered then you may be able to apply to the insurer to cover your condition," says Bird.

See page 29 for insurers that cover pre-existing conditions.

4 Not shopping around to save money

Some travel insurance premiums increased by as much as 30% between March and June 2022. The good news is there are several ways you can make savings on your travel ►



insurance, not least by comparing prices and closely examining product disclosure statements to understand what's included.

Some policies offer online discounts, or you may be eligible for member discounts for as much as 10–15% from your current health insurance, car insurance or home insurance provider. If you're not sure, call them to ask. If you plan to travel multiple times during the year, you may also want to consider a multi-trip policy that can help you make savings.

Haggling over the price of insurance may not be easy if you're buying online, but if you're buying travel insurance through a travel agent, it's worth asking if there are any deals or discounts available.

You may be eligible for a discount on travel insurance from your current health, car or home insurance provider

5 Relying on your credit card travel insurance

Travel insurance is often offered up as a benefit for signing up to a premium credit card, but if you're planning on using that insurance, it's important to scrutinise the terms and conditions closely to see if it meets your needs.

Check on things such as what you need to do to activate the cover on your card, the excess you'll have to pay, what they will pay for overseas medical expenses, if it includes cover for COVID or other family members, and if there are any restrictions on the maximum period you can travel for. Depending on your circumstances, it may be necessary for you to buy a standalone travel insurance policy to get the cover you need.

6 Misunderstanding 'cancellation cover'

If you have a comprehensive travel insurance policy, it will include cancellation cover. This is a good benefit to have if you need to cancel your trip for reasons out of your control, such as if the travel advice for the country you're travelling to changes, if you or someone you care for gets seriously ill, or there's an emergency situation immediately before you're due to leave.

However, there are specific criteria that must be met to make claims on cancellation cover, and you won't be covered for circumstances such as if you change your mind, your passport didn't arrive in time, or you miss your flight. Read the terms and conditions of your policy closely to ensure you don't end up making a costly mistake. And see our article on your rights around cancelled flights on page 18. ■





Back to the future

The travel insurance landscape has changed a bit since pre-lockdown days.

Jodi Bird takes a tour through both the new and familiar

With more destinations opening up post-COVID restrictions, 'revenge travel' is set for a big 2023. But although many people have by now received their money from cancelled trips, some haven't. So will travel insurance protect ever-increasing holiday costs this time around?



Common insurable events

Much has changed in travel but some things have stayed the same. Research by Smartraveller, published in the

recently updated CHOICE travel insurance guide at smartraveller.gov.au/insurance, found that one in four Australian travellers experienced an insurable event on their last overseas trip.

The most common insurable events were:

- flight or tour cancelled
- flight delayed more than 12 hours
- received medical treatment
- lost, damaged or stolen luggage
- missed a connecting flight
- lost, damaged or stolen cash or personal items
- forced to cancel trip before departure. ▶

NEED TO KNOW

- Some policies may exclude pandemic cover, yet include cover for COVID-19.
- The reason why your flight is cancelled or delayed could determine whether your claim is paid.
- Insurers' definitions of existing medical conditions vary widely.



Received medical treatment

All international travel insurance policies will cover typical medical treatment – it's the essential reason why you need travel insurance when going overseas, regardless of whether it's an adventurous holiday or just visiting relatives.

Quite a few policies exclude medical cover for pandemics, although some of those make an exception for COVID-19. In some cases, however, the insurer's lower cost policies will exclude medical costs for COVID-19 too.

Most of the other typical events, such as terrorism, natural disaster and civil unrest, are generally covered for medical costs. But all policies we looked at exclude cover for outbreak of war, and for travel to countries under an Australian Government 'Do Not Travel' ban.

Current world events are a reminder to know what your travel insurance covers and what's happening in the part of the world where you plan to travel. As we write this, the travel plans of Australians in popular tourist destination Machu Picchu have been disrupted by civil unrest. European destinations that border Ukraine, such as Poland and Slovakia, are still considered safe for travel, but a stray missile that killed two people in Poland late last year is a reminder that instability from war in one country can still affect otherwise safe destinations.

Regardless of where you're travelling to, stay abreast of the news and subscribe to Smartraveller's alerts for your destination at smartraveller.gov.au/subscribe.



Trip, interrupted

For all of the other common insurable events listed, you'll need a form of comprehensive travel insurance.

Several events typically covered for medical costs, such as terrorism, civil unrest, pandemic and COVID-19, may be excluded for cancellation costs by the same policy. So you can't presume that if you're covered for an event for medical, you'll also

be covered for cancellation and other expenses.

Additional accommodation and meal costs for trip disruption or travel delays are often only covered for specific causes. For example, you may be covered if a flight is cancelled due to natural disaster or civil commotion, but not due to an employee strike. CHOICE member Andy found this out the hard way:

"I was pursuing a travel insurance claim for unforeseen accommodation costs resulting from a cancelled Qantas flight.

Top four reasons for declined claims

- Due to policy exclusions, or not included in the policy conditions
- Claim amount was below the excess
- Claim was due to a pre-existing medical condition
- Claim was for an item that was stolen while it was unattended

"The insurer has just denied my claim on the basis that flight cancellation for mechanical reasons (as was later advised by Qantas as the reason) is not on the list of events covered in the policy, which are severe weather, natural disaster, riot, strike, civil insurrection, or hijacking. Whilst this appears to be strictly true, denying a claim on that basis looks pretty unfair to me."

Also, the transport provider may not tell you the reason for cancellation or delays upfront, so you may not know if you're covered for associated expenses until down the track. If you don't know why there's been a disruption, be careful not to assume you'll be covered when deciding whether to fork out for a more expensive meal or hotel for the night.

Australian travellers lodged close to 300,000 insurance claims in 2018–19, the financial year before COVID-19 travel bans

About 90% of those were paid out

ARE
YOU
COVERED?



An eye on valuables

All travel insurance policies exclude cover for ‘unattended items’.

This can be as innocuous as leaving a laptop on the seat beside you at the airport when you look the other way. Travel insurance also excludes cover for valuables, such as laptops, stored in your check-in baggage. So take those items in your hand luggage.

And while items stored in the locked safe of your hotel room are generally covered, items stored in a locked car, even if it’s in the boot, are often subject to reduced cover levels, or exclusions for valuable items.



Existing medical conditions

Existing medical conditions are one of the main reasons a claim may be denied. Unfortunately, it may be even harder than before lockdown to get cover for these, with some insurers that previously covered existing medical conditions no longer operating.

It can be tempting to waive away the importance of cover for your medical condition, especially if you’ve had no symptoms for a while. But read the product disclosure statement (PDS).

Any past or current medical conditions for which you’ve had

symptoms and required medication, consultation or treatment in a specified time period before you book a trip are classified as existing medical conditions. The time period varied in the policies we compared, anywhere from three months to two years.

See the comparison table at right for the relevant time periods for all the insurers, and bear in mind that the shorter the period, the better. If you had a medical condition but you haven’t seen your doctor, taken medication or had any symptoms within the past two years, this may still be classified by a travel insurer as an existing medical condition. And if that condition recurred on your holiday, you could be excluded for expensive medical costs to treat that condition, unless you had it pre-approved by the insurer.



Get the most from your cover

In the comparison table, we’ve listed the price for a couple aged 35 to 39 travelling together to one of Australia’s favourite destinations, Bali, for 10 days. We’ve also obtained quotes for an older couple, where at least one is aged

over 80, travelling to the same destination for the same time period.

The quotes were obtained for trips starting within four days of the date the policy was purchased. The further out from your departure date that you buy travel insurance, the more you’re likely to pay for it, but you’ll be covered from

the moment you buy your policy. For example, if

you buy insurance two months before you fly, you effectively have cheap cover for any events that affect your travel plans in those two months.

Insurers underwritten

by Zurich have a

convoluted clause in place for COVID-19 cancellation cover. If you buy a policy within three weeks of your departure date, they won’t pay cancellation costs for anything you bought more than two days prior to buying the travel insurance policy.

For example, if you fully pay for your trip six months in advance, but you buy an insurance policy just two weeks before you depart, you may not be covered for any cancellation costs if you contract COVID-19.

That’s another reason why it’s often best to buy your travel insurance at the same time that you pay for your trip. ▶

It’s often best to buy your travel insurance at the same time that you pay for your trip

Insurer not included?

Many insurers gradually re-entered the travel insurance market over 2022 with rewritten products. We’re rebuilding our own travel insurance database in response. If the insurer you’re after is not included in the table, check the online travel insurance comparison at choice.com.au/travelinsurance for our most up-to-date list of travel insurers.



	COST			AMOUNT COVERED							SPECIFICATIONS		
	Price: Age 35–39 (\$)	Price: Age 80+ (\$)	Age limit	COVID-19 medical expenses (\$)	Pandemic medical expenses (\$)	Cancellation (\$)	COVID-19 cancellation (\$)	Pandemic cancellation (\$)	Baggage (\$)	Rental excess (\$)	Existing medical condition exclusion period (months)*	Cruise cover	
1Cover Comprehensive	166	521	None	Unlimited	0	Unlimited	0	0	15,000	5000	12	Optional	
1Cover Medical Only	132	na	74	Unlimited	0	0	0	0	0	0	12		
AHM Comprehensive	263	874	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen	5000	Cover chosen	8000	5000	12	Optional	
AHM Medical Only	60	302	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	0	0	0	0	0	12	Optional	
Allianz Basic	90	na	74	Unlimited	Unlimited	0	0	0	0	0	na		
Allianz Comprehensive	159	347	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen	Cover chosen	Cover chosen	10,000	6000	24	Optional	
Cover-More Travel Insurance Basic	190	459	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen	0	0	5000	0	12	Optional	
Cover-More Travel Insurance Comprehensive	226	545	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen	0	0	15,000	5000	12	Optional	
Cover-More Travel Insurance Comprehensive Plus	427	1085	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen	5000	0	25,000	5000	12	Optional	
Flight Centre YourCover Essentials	270	650	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen	0	0	8000 (A)	5000 (A)	12	Optional	
Flight Centre YourCover Plus	468	1237	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen (B)	5000	0	15,000	10,000	12	Optional	
Go Insurance Go Basic	197	na	74	Unlimited	0	5000 (A)	5000	0	2500 (A)	0	3	Optional	
Go Insurance Go Plus	261	na	74	Unlimited	0	15,000 (A)	15,000	0	7500 (A)	2500 (A)	3	Optional	
Insureandgo Bare Essentials	75	na	79	0	0	0	0	0	2000	0	12	Optional (C)	
Insureandgo Gold	135	598	100	Unlimited	0	Unlimited	5000	0	15,000	8000	12	Optional (C)	
Insureandgo Silver	142	631	100	Unlimited	0	15,000	2500	0	6000	4000	12	Optional (C)	
Medibank Travel Insurance Comprehensive	378	1137	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	5000	Unlimited	15,000	6000	12	Optional	
Medibank Travel Insurance Medical Only	124	356	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	0	0	0	0	0	12	Optional	
NIB Comprehensive	310	1031	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen (B)	10,000	0	12,000	5000	6	✓	
NIB Essentials	180	na	69	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen (B)	0	0	5000	2000	na	✓	
Tick Travel Insurance Basic	108	na	69	0	0	0	0	0	2000	0	na		
Tick Travel Insurance Budget	138	na	79	0	0	5000	0	0	2500	0	na		
Tick Travel Insurance Standard	195	870	100	Unlimited	0	5000	2500	0	4000	2000	12		
Tick Travel Insurance Top	228	1032	100	Unlimited	0	20,000	2500	0	7500	4000	12		
Travel Insurance Direct Basics	226	na	74	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen (B)	0	0	2000	6000	6	✓	
Travel Insurance Direct The Works	299	na	74	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen (B)	2500	0	12,000	6000	6	✓	
Worldcare Comprehensive	167	475	None	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen (B)	Cover chosen (B)	Cover chosen (B)	10,000	6000	24	Optional	
Worldcare Essential	126	na	74	Unlimited	Unlimited	Cover chosen (B)	Cover chosen (B)	Cover chosen (B)	5000	3000	na		
World2Cover Basics	70	na	84	0	Unlimited	0	0	0	2000	0	12	Optional	
World2Cover Essentials	104	na	84	0	Unlimited	25,000	0	25,000	7500	4000	12	Optional	
World2Cover Top	151	na	84	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	3500	Unlimited	15,000	5000	12	Optional	

TABLE NOTES Price Prices are for a couple aged 35 to 39 and for an older couple where at least one is over 80, travelling to Bali for 10 days. The quotes were obtained in November 2022 for trips starting within four days of the date the policy was purchased. * To be covered for an existing medical condition (that isn't specifically excluded), you must not have had symptoms or required medication, consultation or treatment for that condition within this period prior to booking your trip. (A) Optional cover. (B) Variable cover options available. Quotes have been selected for the closest cover amount to \$10,000. (C) Cruise cover available as a separate policy. na Not applicable. ■

TRICKY BUSINESS

Being alert to the sales tricks used in the supermarket aisle can help you save money when you shop, writes **Jenny Baldwin**

The trolleys seem to be getting bigger, the eggs are elusive, and the first thing inside the entrance is the squashable fruit and veg – which would surely be better placed on top of everything at the end.

Not according to the vast amount of research underpinning the way your local supermarket is laid out. When you shop at Coles, Woolworths, Aldi, or even some of the smaller supermarket chains, every detail has been designed to make you spend more.

From how many minutes it takes before you start buying on impulse, to which shade of yellow you like best for bananas – it's all been studied by

consumer psychologists and fed into supermarket design.

Understanding these tricks and traps can really help you save money. We take a look at some of the common ploys used to make us feel good and spend big.

If you feel good, you're likely to buy more throughout the store

A fresh start

The fruit and veg zone is almost always the first thing you encounter in a supermarket. In simple terms, it's there to make you feel good. If you feel good, you're likely to buy more throughout the store.

"Consumer research tells us we associate green with freshness, health and vitality," says Jana Bowden, professor of marketing and consumer behaviour at Macquarie University. "Fresh vegetable displays are geared

NEED TO KNOW

- Fresh produce at the entrance primes us to buy non-essential 'treats' later.
- We make more impulsive and emotional purchase decisions after 23 minutes in the supermarket.
- Our brains are 'wired' to respond to special offers and we get a little hit of dopamine when we think we've got a deal.

towards encouraging consumers to feel good about their lifestyle choices.

"Also, buying fresh, nutritious produce early in the shopping trip ►

acts as a sort of approval to cart more 'guilty pleasure' foods such as snacks and confectionery later on. These, of course, are often higher-priced products."

Another key feature of the fresh food zone is the open plan layout, with varied flooring and lighting. There might be an on-site bakery, and fish, meat or deli counters.

"It's about creating a market-like feel," says Dr Paul Harrison, consumer psychologist and senior lecturer at Deakin University. "It feels as though we've visited several different stores rather than a single big shop. And areas such as the bakery give the impression the supermarket is trustworthy. It's like they're saying, 'You can trust us because we make stuff'.

Aisle ends and nudges

Once you have your fruit and veg on board, it's time to push on into the aisles. Studies of shoppers using GPS trackers show we're most likely to walk the perimeter, ducking into some aisles and skipping others.

This means those end-of-aisle displays – called 'end caps' – are big business for supermarkets. They can sell up to eight times better than items on regular shelves.

Brands pay a premium to place their products here. And it's under those yellow and red 'specials' signs that our good intentions may come undone.

"Offers like buy one get one free, cashback offers, free sample offers and bonus items are 'nudge' tricks," says Bowden.

"They get us to impulse buy or buy more in order to qualify for the deal –

and when we get a deal, we get a temporary shopper's dopamine high."

Unfortunately, even the most savvy shopper is vulnerable to the 'nudge effect' of a special.

"It's human nature to be attracted to a bargain," says Harrison. "It also feeds into a theory known as the scarcity effect. This is where we think that if it's on special, then it must only be available at this shop or for a short time, and we afford it more value than the products around it."

Colour psychology

Another subliminal 'nudge' used at the supermarket is colour.

Billy Sung is professor of consumer psychology and neuroscience at Curtin University. He says colour psychology is complex, and colour association depends on factors such as where we grow up, and our culture.

But there is some consensus. "We know that products packaged in green are more likely to be

deemed environmentally sustainable," he says. "And black and gold together signifies an item is luxurious or premium."

He says red and yellow is used for signage not because it stimulates hunger, as once thought, but because it's eye-catching, and we're now conditioned to associate it with a bargain.

Colour theory is applied in myriad other ways. Bowden explains that some years ago, research was done on which shade of yellow was most favoured by shoppers buying bananas.

"Shoppers prefer Pantone 12-0752, or Buttercup yellow, as opposed to Pantone 13-0858 Vibrant Yellow," says Bowden.

Naturally, some banana farmers adjusted the timing of their crops to nail the right shade.

The long shop

So, where are those eggs? Whichever aisle they're in, they're probably in the middle, with other popular products.

"Products packaged in green are ... deemed environmentally sustainable"



Splitting up the staples, such as bread, milk and eggs, and placing popular items mid-aisle are classic supermarket tricks. Apart from exposing us to further temptation, it slows us down.

This works very well for the supermarket, especially as it appears there's a burnout point at which we start buying with our heart instead of our head.

"Using functional magnetic resonance imaging of shoppers' brains, research has found that after about 23 minutes of supermarket shopping, consumers hit a mental 'burnout' wall," explains Bowden.

"Decision-making shifts from being cognitive and thought-based to much more reactive, impulsive and emotional. And after 40 minutes of shopping, consumers' brains tune out to rational thought."

"If you can get most people to spend even 10 cents more, you're making a lot of money"

The quick shop

If the customer who stays a long time is a boon for the supermarket, there's another type of shopper who's even more valuable.

"Research shows if you can get a customer in for five or 10 minutes they spend more per minute than a customer who's in for 30 minutes or so," says Harrison. "The high-value customer is the short-visit customer."

Supermarkets are responding to this with design tweaks, such as more self-checkouts, to get people in and out as fast as possible. Proponents claim it's efficient for the customer, and cheaper for the supermarket.

"The old idea that you stick the milk at the back isn't necessarily the case now," says Harrison. "Smart supermarkets are putting a limited



selection of bread and milk at the front of the shop, and a more extensive selection at the back."

And beside those 'quick grab' essentials, they're positioning premium items that are really about convenience and solving a problem.

"They put different problems together and help people fix them," says Harrison. "Ready to go items, premium stuff, something a bit exotic, things in baskets... There are big margins in premium products, and it's all about margins. If you can get most people to spend even 10 cents more, you're making a lot of money."

The high-tech approach to customer research

One of the hot research trends is using technology to objectively measure our responses and decision-making.

At Curtin's Consumer Research Lab, Sung works with volunteers hooked up to things such as eye-tracking glasses. Supermarkets

can use data on where we tend to look to work out where to display the most lucrative items.

"90% of our research is done in the lab, in an artificial environment, in front of a monitor to mimic it or [using] VR," says Sung.

"If we're doing it in the field, we use eye-tracking glasses. They allow us to track where people are looking and the size of the pupil. That tells us how much cognitive processing is going on."

Biometric wristbands can also be worn to measure the sweat level and heart rate of shoppers, revealing how interested they are in a product or marketing material. Even the intent to buy can be measured from brainwave headsets.

Meanwhile, other research is continuing on the role strong emotions play in what we buy.

"There's research to show that people who are excited generally spend more money," Sung says. "Feeling sad can lead us to pay more for an item, or to eat unhealthy food. In general, any kind of heightened emotion – whether it's positive or negative – makes us more likely to spend more." ▶

6 ways to save at the supermarket

Our experts' advice will help you avoid the sales tricks supermarkets use to make you spend more



TAKE A LIST

Be specific! Write 'one litre of orange juice' instead of 'orange juice'. It might help you resist a special on a bigger product you don't need.



CHOOSE A SMALLER TROLLEY

Sometimes, you need a big one. But if in doubt, go small. A large trolley gives us psychological permission to cart more.



BE CAREFUL OF BUY NOW PAY LATER

Research shows that the pain we normally feel when paying for something with cash is much reduced when paying with a credit card. And with BNPL, it's so abstract to the brain, we feel virtually nothing.



RESEARCH DEALS ACROSS SUPERMARKETS

When tempted by a deal consider if it's on a product you normally buy, and if it's good enough that you'll be ahead in the long run.



AVOID SHOPPING IF YOU'RE EXCITED OR SAD

High emotion, whether it's positive or negative, has been proven to make us buy more stuff we don't need.



LOOK FOR THE CHEAPEST OPTION

Use unit pricing to help you compare value for money. Buying in bulk is not always the cheapest option, and fresh is not always cheaper than frozen — unit pricing helps you identify the best deal.



How butter is made

Butter is nothing more than cream, with salt sometimes added. So how does it go from cream to butter?

In 'On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen', sometimes referred to as 'the chef's bible', author Harold McGee describes making butter as a simple but laborious task created by agitating a container of cream until the fat globules are damaged and the fat leaks out and sticks together in masses large enough to gather. These solids form the butter, and what's left over is buttermilk.

Many factors impact the flavour of the milk that makes the cream that then goes on to make the butter. The season, the environment, the cow's breed, its feed and the processing all make a difference to the flavour of the milk.

As for the colour of butter, the amount of grass in a cow's diet plays a role here. Grass gives the milk a yellow pigment, so cows that have less grass in their diet often produce a paler butter.

WHAT IS CULTURED BUTTER?

Cultured butter is when the cream used to make the butter is slightly soured by adding lactic acid bacteria before or after it's churned. This is

common practice in Europe and the flavour has been described as a bit more sour and fuller than non-cultured butter.

When categorising butters for this test, we only included butters in the cultured category that specified 'cultured' on the front of the pack. ▶

Cream of the crop

Which butter is better? **Shadia Djakovic** and our team of expert taste testers find out

Butter is made from essentially just one ingredient – cream – so you'd be forgiven for thinking that all butter must taste the same. But its flavour and texture can differ depending on whether it's salted, salt reduced or unsalted; how well it's blended; whether it's cultured or not; where it's from and what the cows feed on.

So which butter tastes best? Our expert panel blind tasted and reviewed 44 butters, from Devondale, Lurpak, Mainland, Pepe Saya, Western Star and more, to find out which is the cream of the crop.



Our butter experts: Adam Moore, Penny Lawson, Petra Sugiarto, Amanda Athis, Brigid Treloar, Andre Sanderson, Daniel Abou-Chedid and Peter Commins. To read about their credentials, visit choice.com.au/butter.



BEST TASTING UNSALTED BUTTER



Westgold Unsalted New Zealand Grass-fed Butter

CHOICE Expert Rating: 75%
Price per 100g: \$1.25
Country of origin: New Zealand
Experts say: “Mild creamy aroma, fresh, clean flavour and aftertaste”; “Slightly cheesy smell, mild dairy aroma”.

BEST TASTING SALTED BUTTER



Kerrygold Pure Irish Salted Butter

CHOICE Expert Rating: 79%
Price per 100g: \$2.40
Country of origin: Ireland
Experts say: “Smooth, yellow, irregular appearance, mild butter aroma with salty butter taste”; “Good body and texture”.



Lurpak Slightly Salted Butter

CHOICE Expert Rating: 76%
Price per 100g: \$2.40
Country of origin: Denmark
Experts say: “Delicate saltiness, not overpowering, mild flavour, short finish and aftertaste, melts quickly”; “Smooth texture and pale, even colour”.

BEST TASTING CULTURED BUTTER



Meander Valley Salted Cultured Butter

CHOICE Expert Rating: 76%
Price per 100g: \$3.08
Country of origin: Australia
Experts say: “Subtle cultured butter flavour”; “Creamy flavour and texture”; “Smells amazing”; “Fair spreadability”; “Bit firm”.



How Australian butter fared

There seems to be an assumption that European butter, in particular French butter, is the best in the world. This may be because European butter usually has added cultures and often a higher fat content, which is believed to contribute to a better flavour and texture.



In our butter taste test, first and equal-second place went to European butters (from Ireland and Denmark), while an Australian product tied for second and a New Zealand product came third.

The one salted French butter that we taste-tested, President French-Made Salted Butter, was in the top 10 of results overall, but the President French-Made Unsalted Butter received the lowest score in its category with 59%.

Admittedly, we only tested two French-made products compared to the 29 Australian butters tested, but perhaps we can still conclude that Australian butter can be very good.

Shop Ethical rating

BRAND	RATING
Aldi	C
Allowrie	C
Coles	F
Dairy Farmers	C
Devondale	F
Great Ocean Road	F
Kerrygold	D
Lurpak	C
Macro	F
Mainland	C
President	F
Pure Valley	C
True Organic	B
Western Star	C
Westgold	F
Woolworths	F

NOTES: Other brands in our test not mentioned here don't have a Shop Ethical rating. For more on Shop Ethical ratings and what they mean, see p73.

The science of butter

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MILK FAT AND TASTE

In Australia, butter must be comprised of at least 80% milk fat. Some say that the higher the milk fat percentage, the richer the butter tastes. However, we didn't see a correlation between milk fat percentage and our taste test results.

For example, the product with the highest percentage of milk fat in our test, **Meander Valley Cultured Salted Butter** (86.6% milk fat), was in the top three scorers for taste alone (that is, not factoring in the nutrition component that makes up the overall score).

But the products with the next highest percentage of milk fat after Meander Valley (**Coles Organic Unsalted Butter** with 84.7% milk fat and **Remarkable Milk Company True Organic Butter Unsalted** with 84.6% milk fat) hovered around the middle of the list in terms of their taste performance.

The butter with the equal-lowest percentage of milk fat – **Kerrygold Pure Irish Salted Butter**, 80% – was the one that took out the top spot in our test, both overall and for taste alone.

IS GRASS-FED BUTTER BETTER FOR YOU?

In Australia, most cows (about 98%) are free to graze on pastures. However, grass-fed cows don't only eat grass. In Australia their diet is about 60–65% grass, with additional nutrition coming from hay, grains and legumes to provide a complete and balanced diet.

Grass-fed dairy has a slightly different nutritional profile to dairy products that come from regular-fed cows. Grass-fed cows produce milk

with a slightly higher omega-3 content, beta-carotene and beneficial fats, so grass-fed butter may be slightly better for you than butter made with cream from cows not predominantly fed grass.

Fourteen of the butters in this test were specified to be from grass-fed cows, with two of them labelled as coming from 'free-grazing cows'.

SPREADABILITY

There is a science to making butter spreadable, and it's all about the crystals and the free fats.

After the cream is pasteurised, it's cooled and left at 5°C for about eight hours. This process causes about half of the milk fat in the globules to form crystals. The amount and size of these crystals help determine the texture of the butter.

When the butter is finally produced, it's a matrix of fat globules, solid crystals and water droplets that are embedded in a mass of semi-solid 'free' fat. A high proportion of 'ordered' crystals leads to butter that is stiff and firm when cold. The amount of crystals compared to free fat determines the butter's spreadability. The free fat gives the butter more spreadability and tendency to leak liquid fat as the butter softens.

Tips for buying, using and storing butter

BUYING

Light and air can each cause oxidation of butter, which affects its taste. Oxidised butter is darker yellow on the outside where it has been exposed. Avoid buying inadequately wrapped products, and be mindful that butters packaged in

semi-transparent white wrapping are more susceptible to surface oxidation than those wrapped in opaque foil due to risk of exposure to light during storage or transportation.

Cultured butter has had live bacterial cultures added to the cream, which causes the butter to taste slightly tangier and have a more distinctive aroma. This is due to the fermentation process by the bacterial culture which converts milk sugar (lactose) into lactic acid.

USING

If serving butter at room temperature, only cut off the amount you know you'll use and leave the rest in the fridge. If you need to bring cold butter to room temperature fast, expert taste tester Adam Moore suggests grating it.

Unsure whether to use salted or unsalted butter? CHOICE home economist Fiona Mair says it's not so important if you use salted or unsalted for your savoury meals as you can always adjust the salt throughout the cooking. Unsalted butter is ideal for sweet baking and savoury pastry as you won't run the risk of the salt overpowering other flavours.

STORING

Storing butter requires coolness and darkness. Make sure your butter is tightly wrapped or stored in an airtight container. This will prevent exposure to oxygen and also prevent the butter from absorbing other odours from your fridge.

Homemade butter will last in the fridge for up to two weeks, depending on the extraction of buttermilk and if salt was added.

Butter can be frozen for up to 12 months if salted, and six months if unsalted. ▶

In Australia, butter must be comprised of at least 80% milk fat

Recommended		Type	COSTS			PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS				
			Pack price (\$)	Pack size (g)	Price/100g (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Expert taste test score (%)	Health Star Rating	Percentage milk fat (%)	Grass-fed	Organic	Wrapper recyclable	Country of origin
✓	Kerrygold Pure Irish Salted Butter	Salted	6.00	250	2.40	79	87	0.5	80	✓			Ireland
✓	Lurpak Butter Slightly Salted	Salted	6.00	250	2.40	76	84	0.5	82	ns			Denmark
✓	Meander Valley Salted Butter Cultured	Cultured	7.70	250	3.08	76	83	0.5	86.6	✓			Australia
✓	Westgold Unsalted New Zealand Grass-Fed Butter	Unsalted	5.00	400	1.25	75	81	1	83.6	✓			New Zealand
	Ballantyne Traditional Salted Butter	Salted	6.79	200	3.40	74	81	0.5	81	ns			Australia
	Coles Australian Butter Salted	Salted	4.00	250	1.60	74	81	0.5	81.3	ns			Australia
	Allowrie Unsalted Butter Choicest Grade	Unsalted	4.80	250	1.92	73	79	1	82.7	ns			Australia
	Dairy Farmers Salted Butter	Salted	3.85	250	1.54	73	79	0.5	81	ns			Australia
	Dairy Farmers Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	3.85	250	1.54	73	80	1	81	ns			Australia
	Devondale Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	4.60	250	1.84	73	79	1	82	✓			Australia
	Kerrygold Pure Irish Butter Unsalted	Unsalted	6.00	250	2.40	73	79	1	82	✓			Ireland
	Lurpak Butter Unsalted	Unsalted	6.50	250	2.60	73	79	1	82	ns			Denmark
	Macro Certified Organic Butter Salted	Salted	4.60	250	1.84	73	80	0.5	80.4	ns	✓	✓	Australia
	Mainland Certified Organic Butter Salted	Salted	5.00	250	2.00	73	79	0.5	81.4	✓	✓	✓	New Zealand
	Mainland Pure New Zealand Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	5.50	250	2.20	73	80	1	82.9	✓		✓	New Zealand
	Great Ocean Road Butter with Sea Salt	Salted	5.20	250	2.08	72	79	0.5	81	ns			Australia
	Mainland Pure New Zealand Salted Butter	Salted	5.00	250	2.00	72	79	0.5	81.4	✓		✓	New Zealand
	The Organic Milk Co Organic Salted Butter	Salted	5.00	250	2.00	72	79	0.5	81.5	✓	✓		Australia
	True Organic Australian Organic Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	6.99	250	2.80	72	78	1	84.6	✓	✓		Australia
	Western Star Original Salted Butter	Salted	4.30	250	1.72	72	79	0.5	80.5	ns			Australia
	Aldi Beautifully Butterfully Salted Butter	Salted	3.45	250	1.38	71	78	0.5	81	ns			Australia
	Macro Certified Organic Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	4.60	250	1.84	71	77	1	81.5	ns	✓	✓	Australia
	The Organic Milk Co Australia Organic Butter Unsalted	Unsalted	5.00	250	2.00	70	75	1	81.5	✓	✓		Australia
	Westgold Salted New Zealand Grass-Fed Butter	Salted	5.00	400	1.25	70	77	0.5	82.1	✓			New Zealand
	Great Ocean Road Butter Unsalted	Unsalted	5.20	250	2.08	69	74	1	83.3	ns			Australia
	President French Made Salted Butter	Salted	5.50	200	2.75	69	75	0.5	80	ns			France
	Coles Certified Organic Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	4.60	250	1.84	68	73	1	84.7	ns	✓		Australia
	Aldi Beautifully Butterfully Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	3.45	250	1.38	67	73	1	81	ns			Australia
	Harris Farm Butter Salted	Salted	3.99	250	1.60	67	74	0.5	81	ns			Australia
	Absolute Organic Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	8.89	250	3.56	66	71	1	82.5	ns	✓		Belgium
	Coles Certified Organic Butter Salted	Salted	4.60	250	1.84	66	73	0.5	81.5	✓	✓		Australia
	Mainland Certified Organic Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	5.50	250	2.20	66	71	1	82.9	✓	✓	✓	New Zealand
	Devondale Salted Butter	Salted	4.60	250	1.84	65	71	0.5	81	✓			Australia
	Woolworths Australian Salted Butter	Salted	4.00	250	1.60	65	71	0.5	81.3	ns			Australia
	Western Star Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	4.30	250	1.72	64	69	1	82.7	ns			Australia
	Absolute Organic Salted Butter	Salted	8.89	250	3.56	63	69	0.5	81	ns	✓		Belgium
	Coles Australian Butter Unsalted	Unsalted	3.80	250	1.52	63	68	1	83.1	ns			Australia
	Pure Valley Organic Australian Butter Salted	Salted	3.99	250	1.60	63	69	0.5	82.1	ns	✓		Australia
	True Organic Australian Organic Salted Butter	Salted	6.99	250	2.80	63	69	0.5	82.1	✓	✓		Australia
	Allowrie Choicest Butter Salted	Salted	4.80	250	1.92	62	68	0.5	82.2	ns			Australia
	Woolworths Australian Butter Unsalted	Unsalted	4.00	250	1.60	61	65	1	81.3	ns			Australia
	Lard Ass Cultured Butter Salted	Cultured	12.00	225	5.33	60	66	0.5	81.5	✓			Australia
	Pepe Saya Australian Cultured Salted Butter	Cultured	9.00	225	4.00	59	64	0.5	82	ns			Australia
	President French Made Unsalted Butter	Unsalted	5.50	200	2.75	59	64	1	82	ns			France

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend butter with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 75% or more. **Price** The pack price in Sydney stores as of September 2022. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of taste 90% (50% flavour and aroma, 30% texture, 20% presentation) and nutrition 10% (100% Health Star Rating, calculated from the details in the nutrition information panel and converted to a percentage). **ns** Not stated. ■

Making ethical shopping easier

With help from Shop Ethical, our product reviews now give a clearer picture of a company's environmental and social track record

In early 2020, CHOICE began to look at how to provide consumers with more information about the ethical and sustainable nature of the products we review.

Our research led us to the Ethical Consumer Group, otherwise known as Shop Ethical, which has been assessing companies on their ethical track record since 2004. The nonprofit organisation gathers assessment information from more than 80 sources, and groups it broadly under the areas of environment, people, animals, and business ethics.

In their own words, Shop Ethical “focuses on the environmental and social record of companies behind common brands, and draws from our extensive database of products, companies and issues.”

As Shop Ethical explains on their website, ethical ratings are not black or white, nor are they static. A company's ongoing actions contribute to it being less ethical or more ethical. Shop Ethical has developed a rating system based on researching and assembling publicly available information on a company's track record, making it simpler for people to make decisions based on ethical considerations when shopping.

It's important to note that these ratings don't apply to the performance of a product itself, but to the company behind the brands

and products. Our members have been asking for more feedback on environmental and social considerations, and Shop Ethical does it at a company-wide level. Shop Ethical does not use a company's own claims when rating companies, but relies exclusively on reputable third-party sources.

Shop Ethical agreed to share their data with us, which we are already including in our product comparison tables online. And from this issue of CHOICE magazine, we'll include Shop Ethical ratings where available alongside our reviews.

The ratings appear as letters, ranging from A through to F, with A being the highest ethical assessment, and F being the lowest. Where there is not enough publicly available information on a company, it won't be included in the magazine.

Shop Ethical is available as an app for iPhone and Android, or online at ethical.org.au. ■

A company's ongoing actions contribute to it being less ethical or more ethical

NEED TO KNOW

- Where available, CHOICE will display Shop Ethical ratings in our product review tables.
- We'll continue to update ratings online as Shop Ethical updates theirs.

RATING	KEY
A	Praises, no criticism
B	Some praise, no criticism
C	Praises, some criticism
D	Criticism, some praise
F	Criticisms

Shop Ethical ratings Shop Ethical rates the environmental and social impact of companies (not products) using independent sources. Where available, we publish Shop Ethical ratings in CHOICE magazine for the brands whose products we test. This rating is not included in our own scoring. If a brand doesn't appear in our Shop Ethical tables, it means there's no rating for that company. Shop Ethical regularly reviews its ratings, but those that appear in CHOICE are correct at the time we went to press. For more, visit ethical.org.au.





Fellow traveller

Your suitcase goes wherever you go.

Rebecca Ciaramidaro finds out which are sturdy and built to last

With travel back on the cards, many of us are now booking those trips we'd put on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you're looking to avoid long queues at check-in and can do without a large suitcase, you might want to opt for a carry-on suitcase instead. Choose well, and it could become your long-term trusty travel companion. Choose badly, and you could end up with dodgy wheels, poor handles and too little space to bring your

goodies back home. In the worst-case scenario, you may even have to replace your suitcase for the return trip.

So how much should you spend? Prices vary hugely – in our test alone, they range from \$49 to \$469. But price isn't always an indication of performance and quality.

Expensive cases are often on sale at prices well below the recommended retail price

Although our recommended models are standouts, all the suitcases we've tested perform very well overall, including the cheaper ones. It also pays to shop around, as expensive cases are often on sale at prices well below the RRP.

NEED TO KNOW

- We put carry-on luggage through the wringer in our labs to determine the best performers.
- Your suitcase should be sturdy and easy to manoeuvre.
- Carry-on luggage needs to meet certain requirements, depending on which airline you're flying with.

What to look for in a suitcase

Lightweight: The weight of the case counts towards your baggage allowance, so look for luggage that's sturdy but lightweight.

Extra carry handles: When it comes to lifting, it helps to have carry handles at the base and/or sides of the suitcase.

Size: The wheels and extendable handle take up some of the internal space, so check that the case has the right volume for your needs before you buy. For carry-on baggage, make sure you check the dimensions against the requirements for the airline. Dimensions are measured by adding the height, width and depth of the bag.

Soft or hard sided: Consider how you'll be using your luggage (for flying, driving or cruising) and where you'll be storing it. Soft-sided suitcases let you cram in extra items. Hard-sided suitcases give more protection for your belongings, but cramming in extra items can get tricky.

Wheels: The case should roll easily and not bounce or tip when being pulled along. Four-wheel spinner models rotate 360°, making them easier to manoeuvre. You can push them alongside you, in front of you, or pull them behind you – but some can be difficult to control across bumpy terrain and can roll away if you're on a slope. Two-wheel models only move forwards and backwards, but are usually better for clearing kerbs and rolling on a variety of uneven surfaces.

Sturdy construction: Look for handles that are firmly riveted to the body of the case. These are less likely to have weak points and break.

Extendable handle: This should be easy to extend and retract, comfortable to grip and lock firmly in place when extended. It should also extend to a comfortable height so the case doesn't bump against your legs as you pull it along.

Expandable: A useful feature if you need to squeeze in a few extra items.

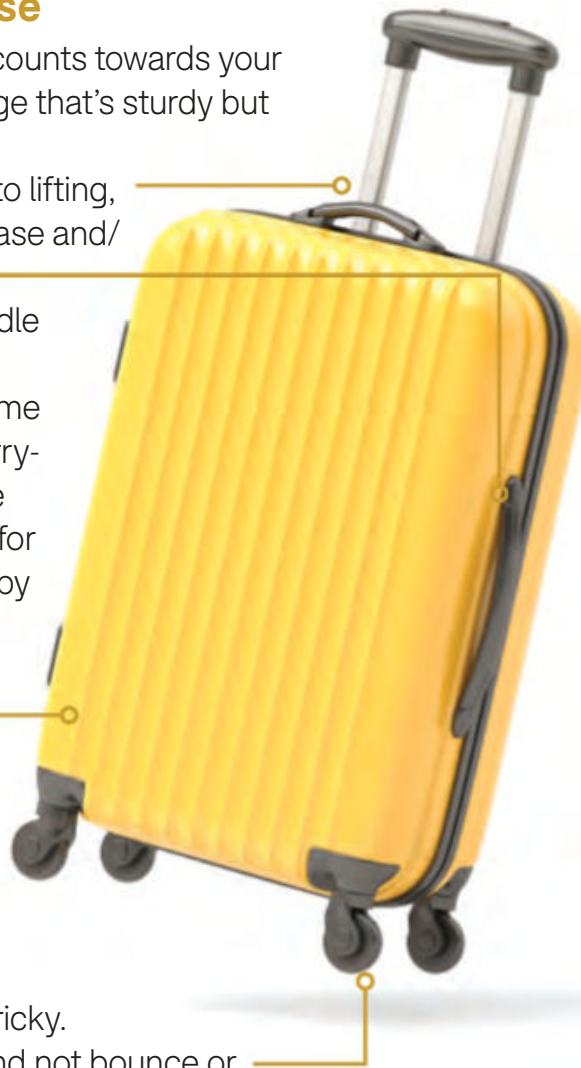
TSA lock: This is common for most suitcases now. A TSA lock is globally recognised, meaning travellers can lock their luggage while letting security authorities inspect baggage without damaging the locks.

Internal and external pockets: Handy for keeping your belongings organised. External pockets are great for quick access, but check they can be locked if you want to use them for important items.

Zips: These should open and shut smoothly. The zip tags should be big enough to grip easily and have holes so you can padlock them.

Internal straps: These help compress and hold your belongings in place. They should be a suitable length and have quick-release buckles.

Water resistance: No suitcase is completely waterproof. Hard cases aren't necessarily more water-resistant than fabric ones, as water can still get through gaps in the extendable handle and zippers. Our results show which models are best at keeping your belongings dry in the event of a downpour. ▶



How we test

Our expert testers assess performance by carrying out the following four tests. They also assess ease of use.

1. Lift-and-drop test

We load carry-on suitcases with 4kg of clothes. Using a custom test rig, we drop the suitcases wheels-first onto a concrete floor 300 times from a height of 90cm, then assess any damage. Models that survive unscathed receive a score of 100%.

2. Puncture test

A heavy pointed cylinder is dropped onto the suitcase's surface to see if it does any damage.

3. Rain test

We stuff suitcases with newspaper and put them under our custom-made shower rig, which simulates a 10-minute downpour. We then assess the cases to see how wet the newspaper became inside.

4. Stability test

We load the suitcases with 4kg and tilt them to see if they tip at a certain angle. Anything that tips at 6° or less is considered unstable and rated 'poor'. Six degrees to 15° is considered reasonably stable and rated 'fair'. Anything above 15° is considered stable and rated 'good'.

Ease of use

Three trialists, including our expert tester, take the suitcases for a walk around the CHOICE building and through our local streets and parks. They look at how easy it is to move the suitcase out of a lift, down a flight of stairs and along carpet, asphalt and cement pathways. They also assess how comfortable it is to use (including handle comfort) and how stable it is while they're walking with it.

EQUAL-BEST HARD CASE

86%

American Tourister Linex 55cm

Exclusively available from the retailer Strandbags, this four-wheel, hard-case model performed excellently in both our lift-and-drop and puncture tests, and is very easy to use, although it's only OK for stability. It has internal pockets and straps, and is expandable. It also has a TSA lock with a three-digit number for the zipper head. The hard-case **Samsonite Hi-Fi Spinner 55/20 EXP** received the same overall score, but is \$135 more expensive (RRP).



BEST SOFT CASE

86%

Samsonite 72 Hours DLX 55cm

If you're after a soft case, this four-wheel, carry-on option is another of our top performers. It performed excellently in the lift-and-drop test, and very well in our stability and puncture tests. It's also light, weighing just 1.8kg. It has internal pockets and straps, two external pockets and comes with an 'emergency carry bag' (a fabric carry-on bag). It has a TSA lock with a three-digit number for the zipper head.



BEST UNDER \$100

84%

Mouv Hard Suitcase

This four-wheel model is the cheapest hard-shell suitcase we tested. Although it just misses out on being recommended, its performance is still impressive. It got excellent results in our lift-and-drop and puncture tests, and a very good result in our rain test. It comes with internal pockets and straps, and a TSA lock. Be aware that, weighing in at 2.7kg, it's one of the heaviest suitcases we've tested.



83%

Kmart Anko Premium Soft Case 8 Wheels 49cm

Costing less than \$50, this soft case is a quiet overachiever, performing just as well as suitcases that cost hundreds of dollars more. It scored very well overall for performance and ease of use. It also has two external pockets, three internal ones, and a TSA lock.



			Performance							Specifications										
Recommended		Price (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Lift and drop test score (%)	Stability test score (%)	Puncture test score (%)	Rain test score (%)	Hard or soft body	Expandable	Internal pockets	Internal straps	External pockets	TSA lock	Number of wheels	Extended handle length (cm)	External dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Stated capacity (L)	Weight (kg)
✓	American Tourister Linex 55cm	240	86	89	80	100	60	91	75	Hard	✓	✓	✓		✓	4	51	55 x 36 x 25	39	2.7
✓	Samsonite 72 Hours DLX 55cm	329	86	91	80	100	80	84	70	Soft		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	50	57 x 35 x 22	36	1.8
✓	Samsonite Hi-Fi Spinner 55/20 EXP	375	86	90	79	100	60	95	85	Hard	✓	✓	✓		✓	4	49	57 x 41 x 23	39	2.5
✓	American Tourister Sunside 55cm Spinner Exp	240	85	90	77	100	60	93	85	Hard	✓	✓	✓		✓	4	52	56 x 42 x 24	38	2.8
✓	Antler Clifton	249	85	89	80	100	60	93	80	Hard	✓	✓	✓		✓	4	51	55 x 38 x 25	38	3.0
✓	Flylite Spin Air 3.0 55cm	220	85	91	75	100	80	71	75	Soft		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	50	54 x 39 x 23	38	2.5
	Flylite Groove Lite 54cm Exp Suitcase	200	84	86	81	100	60	73	70	Soft	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	52	55 x 40 x 24	40	2.2
	Mouv Hard Suitcase	69	84	89	76	100	60	93	80	Hard		✓	✓		✓	4	52	57 x 38 x 22	ns	2.7
	Samsonite Octolite 55cm	289	84	88	79	100	60	93	70	Hard		✓	✓		✓	4	49	55 x 37 x 24	35	2.7
	Antler Prestwick	249	83	89	74	100	60	93	80	Soft	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	51	56 x 37 x 25	45	2.3
	Delsey Turenne 55cm	469	83	89	75	100	60	91	80	Hard					✓	4	50	56 x 35 x 25	48	2.1
	Kmart Anko Premium Soft Case 8 Wheels 49cm	49	83	87	78	100	60	73	75	Soft	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	51	58 x 37 x 26	31	2.5
	Samsonite B'Lite 4 Secure 55cm	299	83	86	79	100	60	74	70	Soft	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	51	54 x 36 x 25	38	2.2
	Caribee Stratos Hybrid Airline Carry On/ Overnight Bag 42L	209	82	85	77	100	60	72	60	Soft		✓	✓	✓		2	53	56 x 39 x 26	42	2.5
	Tosca So Lite 3.0 52cm Trolley Case	169	80	83	74	100	60	58	55	Soft	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	54	57 x 37 x 25	40	2.1

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend luggage with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 85%. **Price** RRP as of August 2022. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). Performance score comprises the lift-and-drop test (60%), stability test (20%), puncture test (10%) and rain test (10%). **External dimensions** Height is measured from the ground to the top of the suitcase and includes the wheels. **ns** Not stated.

Handy travel tips

The carry-on baggage allowance for the major Australian airlines for domestic or international travel is generally 7kg. If you exceed this weight, you could end up paying a fee, or you may need to check in your baggage. Check your airline's restrictions carefully before you travel.

- Government regulations restrict the amount of liquids, aerosols and gels you can take on international flights.
- Containers must be no bigger than 100mL and all containers must be sealed in a transparent ziplock bag (which can't be more than one litre). Only one ziplock bag is allowed per passenger.
- Prohibited items include some sporting goods, kitchen utensils, tools and other objects with sharp edges/points capable of injuring someone. Different rules may apply for domestic and international flights.
- Some previously prohibited items such as umbrellas with metal points, knitting and crochet needles, pointed metal nail files and sports rackets can now be taken on domestic flights.
- Make sure your contact details are clearly shown on each bag in securely attached and weather-proof tags, so you can be contacted in the event of baggage delays or mix-ups.
- If you have to carry hypodermic needles, you'll need to present documentation and identification at check-in.
- Don't leave your baggage unattended and always do your own packing. A lock is one way to deter thieves.
- Pack your valuables in your carry-on luggage.
- Take out comprehensive travel insurance in case you need to replace any lost or stolen items.
- To make your luggage stand out in the crowd or on the airport carousel, choose a brightly coloured suitcase instead of the more common black or dark grey. ■





Lost and found

These smart tags could help you if you tend to misplace things like keys, headphones or your wallet when travelling, says **Chris Barnes**

If you're the kind of person that's constantly losing your keys or wallet at home, then a Bluetooth tracker may be handy. These pocket-sized devices are essentially designed to make your 'dumb' items 'smart' by adding tracking capabilities to a smartphone or tablet app.

And when you're away from home and you can't find your wallet, all you'll need to do is bust out the app and it might lead you right to where you dropped it under the hotel bed.

But, before you tear up your travel insurance policy, there are some

limitations to the technology, as well as some safety aspects, to consider.

How Bluetooth trackers work

These pocket-sized devices come in three styles:

- thin, credit-card sized trackers for your wallet
- small buttons with a hole for a keyring or lanyard
- small buttons with an adhesive pad on the back.

While the first two can be swapped out across different items, adhesive models are hard to take off once

attached. The pad may also lose its adhesiveness once removed, though you may be able to replace it.

Bluetooth trackers come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but they all work the same way. You attach it to an item, sync the tracker to your smartphone or tablet via Bluetooth, and then add it to a list of devices in the app. That's it.

Once connected, you can use the app to locate the tracker by sending out an alert. The tracker can direct you to its location and will make a noise to help you find it. This requires

a clear Bluetooth signal, which can be affected by walls, buildings and other household or outdoor items. If the signal drops out, then some apps will also show you the tracker's last known location.

Some models, such as Apple's AirTag, also have shared or community tracking features. This turns every Apple device into a potential tracker when Bluetooth is active, even if you're outside the range of your tag.

For example, someone else's iPhone with the app enabled might detect your AirTag that's attached to an item you're looking for. The stranger's iPhone will send the location to Apple's servers, and the servers will then send that location to the Find My app, allowing it to show you where your item is.

Broadly speaking, Bluetooth trackers are most useful if you're still in the area where you lost your keys, wallet or headphone case, ideally within 10 metres or so. The audio function may not be overly helpful if you're in a noisy venue, and that's where trackers with community functions come in handy.

Bluetooth trackers are most useful if you're still in the area where you lost the item

BATTERY SAFETY

Button or coin batteries can be dangerous to children if the case isn't secure (or if the tracker itself is small enough to be ingested). If the battery is easy to remove, then your child can swallow it, which may result in injury or death.

Button batteries are also easy to insert into orifices such as the nose or ear which can also lead to hospitalisation or lasting injury for your child. At least three deaths, and multiple hospitalisations, have occurred in Australia due to children ingesting these batteries.

Single-use models with batteries that can't be replaced are safer as the battery is less accessible, but these introduce their own environmental issues. Models with rechargeable

batteries may be slightly better environmentally, but are not as widely available (there were none in our test).

On 22 June 2022 mandatory safety standards for button and coin batteries (and products containing them) came into effect in Australia. We refer to these regulations when we assess Bluetooth trackers for safety.

Be mindful of the fact that a Bluetooth tracker can contain these batteries, and make sure that young kids don't get easy access to the tracker, or any item with a tracker attached.

Bluetooth vs GPS trackers

GPS trackers are another device that you can attach to personal items (or people – personal alarms are also GPS trackers) to be able to get location details.

The main difference between Bluetooth and GPS trackers comes down to the technology used to locate the tracker. GPS trackers receive data from a global satellite network, which means you can zero in on the device from anywhere in the world provided the signal doesn't drop out. This is how features like Find My (Apple) and Find My Device (Android) work on your smart devices. ▶

Batteries

Bluetooth trackers are battery-powered, but they don't require a lot of juice so a single battery and charge will keep them going for months at a time.

Some models are rechargeable but have an inaccessible battery, like a phone, while others use a button or coin battery that you can replace.

Then there are those with batteries that can't be recharged or replaced, the idea being that you just throw them away when the battery dies. This is very wasteful and contributes to the already significant e-waste problems in Australia.



Bluetooth trackers are useful if you're looking for something like your wallet or house keys in your home or hotel room or within Bluetooth range (in our test, Bluetooth performance ranged from 9 to 174 metres, showing that range can vary significantly depending on the Bluetooth version and environment). But if you lost the wallet or keys while out and you're back home, the only way you'll find them via Bluetooth is if someone else is within Bluetooth range of your lost item, has the same app on their phone and has it enabled to send a shared location to your phone or smart device.

GPS trackers (with an embedded SIM) won't need any help from someone nearby as the tracker can send you the location details over a mobile network. The downside is that they're almost always more expensive initially than a Bluetooth tracker, and have ongoing SIM costs.

Features to look for

DATA ENCRYPTION & PRIVACY

It's worth checking to see if the manufacturer is transparent about location data encryption and anonymity where applicable.

- **Does the manufacturer encrypt the tracker's location data?** Not all are clear about this. Of the products in our review, only Apple and Nuttag stated clearly that they encrypt this data. Unencrypted data may be exposed if the company is hacked, and could reveal information that would help a hacker identify you and your address.
- **Does the manufacturer share your phone's location or the tracker's location data with third parties?** While the tracker may collect your location data to send it back to your phone, or from another phone using

Bluetooth trackers contain button batteries, which can be dangerous to children

the same app, it doesn't need to share it with third parties. This may increase data privacy risks if the data isn't anonymised and kept secure by the manufacturer. Any such data sharing and location tracking should state this data usage clearly and require your consent. Of the trackers we reviewed, most stated they either don't do this or require your active consent, but MyTag and Samsung didn't state whether they share this data.

IP RATING (WATER & DUST RESISTANCE)

An ingress protection (IP) rating shows the level of water and dust resistance in the tracker. A rating of IP67 or higher will protect the tracker from rain and if you drop it in shallow water, dirt or mud. This rating also allows it to be rinsed under tap water. Generic terms like 'waterproof' or 'splashproof' can be good indicators, but they're quite broad compared to a specific IP rating.

LONG BLUETOOTH RANGE

A long range means your phone or tablet can detect the tracker from further away. Though most trackers have a range that's big enough for your home, they may not be able to find an item you've dropped outside. Bear in mind that

the smartphone you use will also need to support this feature, and range will be reduced by walls and other objects. Also, claimed range rarely matches actual performance so be sure to check our test results. Some trackers have an effective range of no more than 6–7 metres, which may not be helpful when looking for your keys in a large home.

LOUD SPEAKER

Audio alerts on the tracker aren't much good if they can barely muster a whistle. A loud speaker will make the tracker easier to locate.

LOW BATTERY ALERT

Without battery alerts, the tracker could die and you won't be able to find your items.

SEPARATION ALERTS

This will ping your phone if the Bluetooth signal goes out of range, or if it detects that you've left something behind in a cafe, for example.

SHARING OR MULTI-USER

Some manufacturers let the tracker be tracked by the app on multiple devices at the same time, which can be handy if the tracker is attached to something that more than one person uses, like car keys, but may also allow unwanted tracking and stalking.





			PERFORMANCE									SPECIFICATIONS										
Recommended		Price (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Safety score (%)	Range score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Passed safety tests	Outdoor range (m)	Alert loudness (dBa)	Alert duration (s)	Keyring hole	Sticky pad	Separation alerts	Connect to multiple users	Manufacturer tracking	Location data encryption	Location data shared with 3rd parties	Compatibility: iPhone / Android	Claimed battery life (months)	IP rating	Dimensions (mm, D x L x W)	Weight (g)
✓	Tile Mate	40	95	100	100	64	✓	110	67	(D)	✓		✓ (E)	✓	✓	ns		✓ / ✓	36	(I)	8 x 38 x 38	9
✓	MyTag Edge	40	94	100	85	72	✓	59	53	17	✓		✓	ns	ns	ns	ns	✓ / ✓	12	IP67	9 x 39 x 39	10
✓	Tile Slim	45	94	100	97	64	✓	84	61	(D)			✓ (E)	✓	✓	ns		✓ / ✓	36	(I)	3 x 86 x 54	16
	Apple AirTag	45	88	100	60	60	✓	32	49	8			✓	ns		✓		✓ / –	(H)	IP67	9 x 32 x 32	11
✓	MyTag Classic	30	87	90	89	74	✓	68	62	22	✓	✓	✓	ns	ns	ns	ns	✓ / ✓	6	(J)	6 x 32 x 32	5
	MyTag Sport	40	87	100	38	72	✓	30	53	17	✓		✓	ns	ns	ns	ns	✓ / ✓	12	IP67	10 x 38 x 38	9
✓	Tile Sticker	35	87	90	97	64	✓	84	60	(D)		✓	✓ (E)	✓	✓	ns		✓ / ✓	36	(I)	9 x 28 x 27	7
	Nuttag Find 3	33	71	65	99	68	(A)	89	64	(D)	✓	✓	✓	✓	ns	✓		✓ / ✓	12	ns	8 x 39 x 39	9
	Nuttag Focus Tag	37	71	65	100	68	(A)	125	59	(D)	✓	✓	✓	✓	ns	✓		✓ / ✓	12	IPX2	9 x 40 x 40	15
	Samsung Galaxy SmartTag	63	70	65	100	66	(A)	174	63	(D)	✓			✓	ns	ns	ns	– / (G)	12	ns	11 x 40 x 40	13
	Orbit Keys	35	40	40	20	62	(B)	9	62	16	✓		✓	ns	✓	ns	(F)	✓ / ✓	12	IPX6	10 x 35 x 35	10
	Orbit Stick-On	30	34	20	67	64	(C)	62	55	23	✓	✓	✓	ns	✓	ns	(F)	✓ / ✓	6	ns	5 x 29 x 30	6

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend Bluetooth trackers with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 80%, safety score of at least 80% and range score of at least 70%. **Price** Recommended or typical retail price for a single unit at the time of testing. Prices per unit are usually cheaper for multi-packs. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of the safety score (70%), range score (15%) and ease of use score (15%). We emphasise the safety score due to the potential hazards of the button or coin batteries these products contain. All products in this test used button batteries except the Tile models, which had non-replaceable batteries. **Safety score** Based on our lab testing, and/or the alternative test reports supplied by the manufacturer. **Range score** Comprises indoors and outdoors results. A high score generally indicates good performance both indoors and outdoors. **Ease of use** We assess tracker set up and use, app installation and use, instructions, and versatility for attaching the tracker to items. **Alert loudness** is measured at 1m from device on maximum volume. **(A)** One minor failure. **(B)** One serious and one minor failure. **(C)** Two serious and one minor failure. **(D)** Until you press stop. **(E)** Yes, with paid subscription. **(F)** Yes, with consent. **(G)** Samsung Galaxy only. **(H)** "More than a year". **(I)** "Water resistant". **(J)** "Splashproof". **ns** Not stated. All products tested have one-year warranties (no warranty period stated for the Samsung). All products are made in China, except the Samsung (Vietnam). ■



Keeping tabs

A pill box can help you easily store and access your medications at home or on the road, says **Kim Gilmour**

If you take multiple pills regularly, a pill box could help you store and access your medications easily.

Not all medications are suitable for a pill box, though. As a general rule of thumb, don't use a pill box for:

- anything taken "as required"
- medications unsuitable for light, air and moisture exposure
- any medications that have special-handling instructions.

But with the seemingly endless designs available, how do you choose the right pill box for your daily needs?

Travelling with a pill box

Pill boxes can be great for travel, but you'll need to be careful of the compartments opening in your luggage. Keep them in another smaller bag just in case.

If you're heading overseas, a pill box can be useful when you reach your destination, but the Services Australia website recommends that you keep your medication in original packaging where possible. According to the Smart Traveller website, overseas authorities may also need you to prove that your medication is actually yours. It's

recommended you get a letter from your doctor stating what the medicine is, how much you're on, and that it's for personal use.

Some medications may be restricted or even illegal overseas. Do your research, and if necessary ask your doctor if they can recommend an alternative.

For more advice, see the Medications section of the Smart Traveller website: [smarttraveller.gov.au/before-you-go/health/medications](https://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/before-you-go/health/medications).



What to look for

There are many designs of pill boxes to suit different needs. Here are the main features to consider.

DAILY STORAGE

Many pill boxes let you store a week's worth of pills, with compartments labelled from Sunday to Saturday. Some only include one compartment per day, some two a day (labelled AM/PM), and some even have four a day (often labelled morning, noon, evening and bedtime).

COMPARTMENT SIZES

These range from spacious compartments suitable for larger vitamin supplements to tiny compartments designed for smaller tablets. Some let you separate a day's worth of pills from the main unit (or from the adjoining days' pills), for easy transport in your handbag or pocket.

COMPARTMENT OPENING TYPE

The simplest has a flip-lid that clicks shut. According to our tests, the effort required to open the lids may be too much for people with arthritis, large fingers or weak hands. Another common design uses a push button to pop the lid open or unlock it. Other styles have a sliding lid that covers the compartments of the day's medication.

DISPENSING THE PILLS

A tiny compartment can make it difficult to retrieve one pill at a time, but if the pill box itself is smaller overall, it's easy enough to tip the contents into your hand. Conversely, although boxes with many large compartments can get heavy if they're all full, it's easier to scrape out the required pills. Some pill boxes are 'self-dispensing' – they release medication automatically when needed. We haven't tested this type.



COLOUR SCHEMES

A pill box with a different colour for each time of the day or day of the week can provide visual clues as to when to take your pills, and be handy for people with visual impairments.

LABELLING

The labelling on the pill boxes we tested varies from tiny, hard-to-see days of the week to large, clear signposting. Some also provide Braille on the pill boxes.

SHAPE

Most pill boxes we reviewed are rectangular but some are a circular or polygon shape.

TIMERS

A few of the basic models we've tested have a simple LCD timer, and some more sophisticated models not only have a timer but also a pill dispensing mechanism.

CONSTRUCTION

All the pill boxes we tested are plastic. Pill boxes aren't designed to last forever, and CHOICE Community members describe how the writing on the lids wears off after time. The plastic hinges can also become weak.

RECYCLABILITY

Not all the products we reviewed claim to be recyclable. Information on the type of plastic was minimal, with none specifying on the packaging if they were free of BPA.

How we test pill boxes

After asking the CHOICE Community about whether they use a pill box and what they find useful about them, we set about buying a range from pharmacies and department stores.

EASE OF USE

Our experts rate:

- how easy it is to open the compartments by measuring the force that's required
- how easy it is to remove the pills by either emptying them in the hand or scooping them out one by one
- visual assistance, including whether days are clearly labelled, and if the window is clear enough to see the contents.

As people's individual medications will vary, we used Panadol and Demazin Cold + Flu tablets and capsules as a standard measurement.

DROP TEST

We also conducted a drop test from tabletop height to see if any of the box compartments opened. The fewer compartments that opened when dropped, the higher the drop test score.

GENERAL FEATURES

We logged general features including dimensions, cost and number of compartments.

Best pill boxes

We tested a small selection of pill boxes available from various chemists, discount chains and online specialist stores. These were the easiest to use.

Once-a-day weekly pill boxes

1. SURGICAL BASICS TABLET & VITAMIN PLANNER

Number of compartments: 7

Colour-coded: Yes

Ease of use score: 83%

Drop test score: 70%

Contact: 3p.com.au

A seven-day pill box with large, colour-coded compartment lids that open easily at the press of a button.

Compartments are quite secure but some may pop open if accidentally dropped onto a hard surface. More than 20 Panadol tablets can fit into each compartment.



2. HEALTH & WELLNESS BUBBLE PRESS 7 A DAY TABLET ORGANISER

Number of compartments: 7

Colour-coded: No

Ease of use score: 77%

Drop test score: 70%

Contact:

chemistwarehouse.com.au

This seven-day pill box is small and light, yet each compartment is large enough to fit 20 Panadol tablets. The curved edge makes it easier to scrape the pills out with your finger. There are raised Braille markings and one letter to represent each day of the week. A couple of compartments may open if dropped onto a hard surface.



3. KMART ANKO 7-DAY PILL BOX

Number of compartments: 7

Colour-coded: No

Ease of use score: 77%

Drop test score: 70%

Contact: kmart.com.au

If you don't take large pills, this cheap and simple pill box could be suitable. There's one letter representing each day of the week, and raised Braille markings. Although only ten Panadol tablets can fit into each compartment, the box is small and light (15.5cm x 4cm), and easy to carry. The compartments are easy to flip open and empty into your hand, which is just as well as your finger won't fit with the pills inside. Compartments are quite secure, but some may pop open if dropped onto a hard surface. ▶



Twice-a-day weekly pill boxes

1. TABTIMER RAINBOW CONNECTION PILL BOX TIMER TT4-15 (PORTABLE ALARM PILL BOX)

Number of compartments: 15

Colour-coded: Yes

Ease of use score: 70%

Drop test score: 70%

Contact: tabtimer.com.au

A handy weekly planner with colour-coded AM and PM compartments, plus a bonus “emergency” compartment. There’s a built-in alarm to help you remember your tablets. You can slide the daily compartments apart, although some of them felt a bit loose. Expect a few compartments to open if dropped onto a hard surface, and the alarm battery cover may fall off. We could fit a generous 16 Panadol tablets per compartment.



2. EZY DOSE PILL PLANNER WEEKLY AM/PM WITH PUSH BUTTONS (XL)

Number of compartments: 14

Colour-coded: Yes

Ease of use score: 77%

Drop test score: 50%

Contact: ezydose.com

This twice-a-day weekly planner has clearly labelled days of the week and separate AM/PM compartments. There’s a clear window to see the contents inside the box, and a push-button opening that doesn’t require too much force if placed on a flat surface. Curved edges in the compartment make it easier to use a finger to scrape the pills out, and it’s colour-coded for time of day. As the name suggests, it’s extra large, comfortably fitting more than 20 Panadol tablets. But expect quite a few lids to open if it gets accidentally dropped onto a hard surface.



3. 1ST CARE WEEKLY AM/PM PILL BOX ONE-TOUCH PUSH-BUTTON

Number of compartments: 14

Colour-coded: Yes

Ease of use score: 77%

Drop test score: 50%

Contact: pjsas.com.au

Another push-button, twice-a-day weekly pill box that contains generous storage space for 20-plus Panadol tablets and enough space for you to scrape any tablets out with a finger. Colour-coded for AM and PM, and the days of the week are printed in large letters. Expect quite a few lids to open if it gets accidentally dropped onto a hard surface.



Four-times-a-day weekly pill boxes

1. TABTIMER HANDI-PILL ORGANISER

Number of compartments: 28

Colour-coded: No

Ease of use score: 73%

Drop test score: 100%

Contact: tabtimer.com.au

This pill box has small compartments so it isn’t suitable for large vitamin pills. You can detach each day’s pills from the base for transport, and lift the tab to tip the pills out. There’s also an alarm clock that can signal when to take your medication. The clock is also detachable and you can attach a day’s tablets to it using the hooks. Symbols indicate the time of day each tablet should be taken, and help you attach the day’s compartments the correct way up, so you don’t reverse the order of tablets.



2. PRICELINE PILL PLANNER FOUR-A-DAY WEEKLY

Number of compartments: 28

Colour-coded: Yes

Ease of use score: 70%

Drop test score: 50%

Contact: priceline.com.au

At 22cm x 16cm, this isn’t a pill box destined for a carry bag, but it is useful if you need to take pills multiple times a day. The gap between the noon and evening lids is a bit narrow if you have larger fingers. And it may be tricky to tip pills into your hand, due to the box’s size. The days of the week and times of day are clearly labelled on the compartments, with different colours for each time zone, and clear windows let you see what’s inside the box. The large compartments take more than 20 Panadol tablets. But you can definitely expect a few of the compartments to open if you drop the box.



3. HEALTH & WELLNESS REMOVABLE 7 DAY TABLET ORGANISER DETACH & GO

Number of compartments: 28

Colour-coded: No

Ease of use score: 70%

Drop test score: 50%

Contact: pjsas.com.au

You can detach a day’s worth of pills from the base of this box and carry the column with you. It’s small and light, and it’s easy to pour pills out into your palm. There are Braille markings on the lids. The release button on the base plate takes some effort to press, and a lot of compartments will fall out and likely open if the box is dropped on a hard surface. ■





Sleep through summer

Though many manufacturers advertise ‘cool’ mattresses, **Peter Zaluzny** finds that few of them live up to their claims

Sweaty summer nights rarely result in good sleep, and a ‘cool’ mattress seems like the perfect solution. But our tests have found that vague terms such as “cooling gel”, “air flow”, “natural regulation” and so on tend to be nothing but marketing hype.

Of all the models we’ve looked at over the years, only a handful have come back with a cool feel in our insulation assessment, and latex and spring mattresses have both been among those select few. Which means buying based on the mattress construction alone won’t necessarily guarantee you a cooler sleep.

Buying based on the mattress construction alone won’t guarantee you a cooler sleep

How we test mattress insulation

The process is complicated but, in short, we use a powered thermal device to test mattress insulation.

The more heat that’s absorbed away from the device into the mattress, the higher the score it receives and the better the cooling ability of the mattress. The thermal device is a copper plate, which we place on top of each mattress and heat to 37°C. We then measure over an eight-hour period how much energy it takes to keep the mattress where it touches the copper plate at 37°C.

The amount of energy that’s required to keep the temperature at

37°C is recorded in kilowatt hours (kWh) and used to determine the insulation. Once recorded, we use a relative scale to classify the energy used in everyday language, not unlike the scale we use in our test scores.

For example, if lots of energy is required to heat the plate, this means the mattress is “cool”, as it efficiently moves the heat away from your body through the mattress. If less energy is required, it’s classified as warm.

Do you need a cool mattress?

A nice cool mattress sounds like a dream when you’re awake and cursing the stifling heat at two in the morning. It makes sense if you’re the kind of sleeper that runs hot all year long, or you live in a tropical climate.

But come winter, a mattress with cool insulation could leave things ▶

a little too frosty. So before you buy, think about mid-year temperatures in your area and whether you'd prefer to stay warm in winter or cool in summer.

You may be out of luck if you like a foam bed though. Not one of the memory or regular foam mattresses in our test had cool insulation results.

Keeping your mattress clean throughout summer

Though mattresses only need a big clean twice a year, the human secretions that are exacerbated by summer heat mean you may need to do a few more checks. Sweat is the main culprit here as it can stain and even stink up your bed if ignored.

STAINS

A good stain remover, such as upholstery or enzyme cleaner, or a drop of mild dishwashing liquid in one cup of water can sort out sweaty spots. Remember to keep the mattress dry by dabbing on a small amount then blotting it straight away. Repeat until the stain is gone.

SMELLS

UV light is a great deodoriser. The warm months are a great opportunity to move your mattress into the sun and let nature do its thing for a few hours. Just keep an eye out for rain or animals that might like a nap.

Bicarb soda can also suck out the smells. Sprinkle some across the mattress then leave it for at least a few hours, then vacuum it up. You'll get the best results if you leave your mattress in the sun for a bit, then bicarb treat it overnight.



THE COOLEST OF THE COOL

77%
Zenna Latex
Queen Mattress
\$1595 (price paid)

This is the top performing mattress with a cool feel in our test, and the second-best model overall (shared with the **Sleep Republic Mattress** and **Snooze Madison Rockefeller**). It has a very good comfort retention score for men and women, which means the support won't change much after eight years of use, and it also shows minimal signs of sagging. It's also among the most stable mattresses we've seen, which is great for couples and restless sleepers. However, it does tend to absorb sweat, so try to keep it clean.

\$1795
(RRP)



The 25-year warranty is a standout, even though the returns policy during the 100-night free trial period is a little ambiguous – you may or may not be charged a \$150 collection fee. Also, our test results found that the Zenna Latex is a very soft mattress, even though it's advertised as firm, but that discrepancy isn't uncommon in this industry.

76%
Art & Science Silver
Queen Mattress
\$399 (price paid)

If you prefer the feel of a spring mattress then consider this model. It has a cool feel and does a better job of repelling sweat than the **Zenna Latex**, which can help to extend its lifespan. Comfort retention after eight years is excellent as well, so the initial feel will barely change over its lifespan. Unlike mattress-in-a-box models, this spring mattress

\$649
(RRP)



doesn't have a free trial period so you'll need to visit a showroom if you want to try it out. Like the Zenna (and most mattresses we test) the advertised firmness didn't match our results as we found it to have more of a soft feel despite the "firm" advertising claims.



Recommended		Type	Build	Price (\$)	PERFORMANCE											
					CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Comfort out of the box (%)		Comfort retention after eight years (%)		Stabilisation score (%)	Sagging score (%)	Sweat repellent score (%)	Usage wear or damage score (%)	Insulation (tested)	Advertised firmness	Tested firmness
						Female	Male	Female	Male							
✓	Emma Comfort	Box	Foam	1599	81	75	76	96	86	78	98	61	90	mw	mf	m
✓	Sleep Republic Mattress	Box	Spring	1399	77	64	52	89	99	56	98	100	90	mw	mf	s
	Snooze Madison Rockefeller	Retail	Spring	4599	77	62	55	93	95	68	86	80	90	mw	f	m
✓	Zenna Latex Mattress	Box	Latex	1795	77	70	55	96	87	78	96	66	90	c	a	vs
✓	Art & Science Silver	Retail	Spring	649	76	61	65	98	92	68	85	76	90	c	f	s
✓	Koala Calm As Mattress	Box	Foam	1799	76	69	56	99	92	66	96	58	90	w	a	vs
✓	A.H. Beard King Koil Comfort Plus	Retail	Spring	1199	75	60	47	93	96	78	74	76	90	c	f	s
✓	Valmori Spring Mattress	Box	Spring	1250	75	68	50	98	90	68	95	64	90	c	f	m
	Deep Dream Charcoal Infused Pocket Spring Mattress	Box	Spring	699	74	59	59	93	95	68	85	55	90	mw	f	s
	Macoda Mattress	Box	Hybrid	1100	74	56	50	94	96	66	95	63	90	w	a	vs
	Slumberland Sutton Pillowtop	Retail	Spring	1449	74	71	58	94	95	78	57	57	90	mw	f	m
	Ikea Valevåg	Retail*	Spring	499	73	57	47	95	80	80 (A)	95	76	50	mw	f	vs
	Bedgear M2	Retail	Foam	999	73	61	60	94	89	54	87	66	90	mw	f	m
	Comfort Sleep Verve Accent	Retail	Spring	1299	73	51	48	87	90	88	84	72	90	mw	f	s
	Koala Mattress (2021 model)	Box	Foam	1099	73	60	45	100	91	66	93	62	90	mw	a	vs
	Noa Mattress (2021 model)	Box	Spring	1129	73	58	52	95	94	66	93	59	90	mw	mf	s
	Noa Lite	Box	Spring	1049	72	58	54	93	94	68	88	55	90	c	mf	s
	Silent Partner Cosmopolitan	Retail	Spring	1699	71	58	54	92	92	54	68	81	90	mw	f	m
	Sleeping Duck Mach II	Box	Spring	1649	71	60	47	93	89	56	71	80	90	mw	a	vs
	Sommuto Mattress	Box	Foam	949	71	63	45	86	95	44	91	87	90	vw	ns	vs
	Peacelily Queen Mattress	Box	Foam latex	1599	70	57	50	96	96	56	82	52	90	c	a	s
	Sealy Posture Sense Miami Deluxe	Retail	Spring	999	70	60	54	94	95	36	67	92	90	c	f	m
	Sealy Posturepedic Exquisite Iridium	Retail	Spring	5199	70	55	52	84	94	58	75	77	90	mw	f	s
	Ikea Åkrehamn	Retail*	Foam	899	69	61	57	86	75	60 (A)	84	56	90	w	f	m
	A.H. Beard King Koil Everyday Comfort MK2	Retail	Spring	799	69	57	45	92	97	58	73	54	90	c	f	vs
	Art & Science Gold	Retail	Spring	999	69	50	53	84	90	68	84	60	90	mw	f	vs
	Ergoflex 5G Memory Foam Mattress	Box	Foam	1649	69	52	46	85	83	52	96	73	90	mw	mf	s
	Ikea Vatneström	Retail	Spring	1399	69	55	50	91	91	68	69	73	70	c	f	s
	SleepMaker Impulse	Retail	Spring	999	69	62	52	91	91	24	85	87	90	c	f	m
	Snooze Madison Grosvenor	Retail	Spring	4199	69	61	45	93	84	66	65	100	90	mw	f	s
	Brosa Firm Favourite	Box	Foam	1062	68	67	58	91	91	54	39	71	90	mw	f	m
	OneBed Original 10"	Box	Foam	1390	68	58	43	92	93	56	85	53	90	w	a	s

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend mattresses with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 75% or more. Though the Snooze Madison Rockefeller scored 76% in our tests, we can't recommend it as it arrived with rust on the frames. **Type Box** Mattress in a box. * Roll-packed. **Price** Recommended retail or typical retail price as of November 2022. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of out-of-the-box body comfort (male and female average) (30%), overall change in comfort after eight years of use (30%), stabilisation (15%), sagging (10%), sweat repellent (10%) and usage wear/damage (5%). **Comfort score out of the box** We conduct body support tests for both dorsal (back) and lateral (side) positions when the mattress is brand new. **Comfort retention score after eight years** Indicates how similar a mattress feels to its out-of-the-box comfort score after eight years. A higher score indicates greater comfort similarity. **Stabilisation score** We measure the movement of the mattress after a standard impact (17.5kg), simulating the turning body of a sleeping person. We also count the number of bounces up and down before the mattress is calm again. Higher-scoring mattresses exhibited fewer bounces and less movement during standard impact. Two tests are conducted and results are averaged – a single sensor to measure stabilisation for a single sleeper followed by a double sensor to measure two sleepers in the same bed. **Sagging score** We measure height and firmness straight out of the box when the mattress is new, then again after a test that simulates eight years of use to note any differences. Mattresses with a higher score show less sagging over time, while lower scoring mattresses show increased sagging. **Sweat repellent score** Assesses permeability and water intake. Lower scoring mattresses absorb more fluids, which can cause damage and odour build-up over time. **Usage wear or damage score** Visible damage such as cracking, broken springs or pilling is assessed after the eight-year-use simulation. A higher score means less damage. **Insulation c** Cool, **mw** Medium warm, **w** Warm, **vw** Very warm. **Advertised and tested firmness m** Medium, **mf** Medium firm, **f** Firm, **a** Adjustable (tested in firm configuration), **vs** Very soft, **s** Soft. **(A)** Single sensor test results only. **ns** Not stated. ■



Clean therapy

Stick vacuums are becoming full replacements for regular vacuums, with innovative features to detect and remove household dust, says **Kim Gilmour**

Just five years ago, the mid-level price of a cordless stick vacuum was \$299. Today, it's about \$624, with a number of high-end stick vacs from Dyson, LG and Samsung reaching the \$1200 mark and beyond. These costlier models often come with extra features such as swappable batteries, automatic dust emptying stations, motorised cleaning heads, specialised cleaning tools, mop attachments, HEPA filters and dirt detection technology. Even Miele, a brand that traditionally focused on corded models, now has a range of stick vacs. And based on the number of visitors to our stick vacuums content on our website, we know our members love them too. So, what are

the innovations our expert testers expect to see more of this year?

Auto-emptying stations

These save you from constantly emptying a stick vac's relatively small dust bin. Place the vacuum back in the docking unit and the dust gets emptied from the receptacle into a larger, disposable bag. **LG** and **Samsung** have released their own versions, and we won't be surprised to see more on the market this year. They could also be useful for people with allergies as it minimises the exposure of dust, but the bags aren't reusable – or cheap (a 3-pack for LG's model costs \$39, and a 5-pack for Samsung costs \$29). You also have to eventually dispose of the bag.

Some stick vacs can analyse the amount of particles you're picking up

NEED TO KNOW

- Some models now have automatic emptying bins.
- Storing a stick vac's multitude of accessories can be challenging.
- Median price of a stick vac is more than twice what it was five years ago.

Dirt detection

Want data on how much dirt you're picking up? **Dyson's V15** and **Gen5detect** can analyse the amount of particles you're picking up, with the latter even telling you how clean your floors are getting as you go over them. They also illuminate the dirt on hard floors. The **Tineco Pure One S12** also has a sensor that adjusts suction

How we test

Our experts Matthew Tung and Adrian Lini conduct a range of tests to assess performance and ease of use.

PERFORMANCE

- **Hard floor dirt pick-up:** We use cornflakes, potting mix and flour to evaluate how well the stick vacuum picks up each of these.
- **Pet hair removal:** We embed cat hair into the carpet and vacuum it to a set pattern and speed in exactly the same way as the dirt pick-up test.
- **Quick carpet clean test:** We measure dirt pick-up from the carpet after just four passes of the cleaning head, as this is how most people will vacuum.

- **Thorough carpet clean test:**

We embed sand evenly into a section of carpet and vacuum it. After 10 passes up and down the carpet the sand is weighed and recorded; this is done twice for each model and the results are averaged to get our score.

The following performance tests don't contribute to the overall score:

- **Cleaning corners and edges:**

Sand is spread into a tight corner and vacuumed to see how close to the corner the cleaner is able to pick up dirt using the standard cleaning head. We don't score this, as you'll get better results using a crevice tool. Most vacs in our test were "OK" to "Good" at this.

- **Car cleaning:** We comment on how well the models pick up pebbles and sand from a car, if the vacuum has a handheld mode available.

- **Noise test:** We measure how loud they are and comment on the pitch of each vacuum.

EASE OF USE

We assess how easy it is to:

- manoeuvre the vacuum cleaner
- empty and clean the dirt receptacle (for models with auto emptying functions, we still base our score on emptying the main vacuum)
- operate the machine's controls
- to use and store the supplied accessories.

power depending on how much dirt you're picking up and tells you when the area is clean.

Storage solutions

A common stick vac feature is a clip on the wand to store your crevice tool. This isn't enough nowadays, with so many tools to keep track of. Some models like the **Wertheim Evolution** and **Beko PowerClean Pro** have charging stations that double as a storage dock for some (or even all) of your tools, and others like the **Samsung Bespoke Jet** have a handy storage caddy that keeps your tools tidy. **Dyson's Gen5detect** even lets you store the crevice tool into the main wand. However, there are still plenty of models who could improve on this area; many don't provide sufficient storage for the many bits and pieces.

Tool trends

While it's tempting to always default to your main multipurpose brush head, a soft or fluffy hard-floor head is ideal for picking up crumbs, seeds and other large, loose bits of debris

on a hard floor. Handy accessories like a flexible or bendable extension accessory to get around car seats are also worth considering. The crevice tool for corners and edges is a trusty favourite, and generally

available with all stick vacs we test. Mopping heads are available on some vacuums too; these aren't a must-have according to our experts though, and are really only for buffing up your floor, not for large spills. ▶



DUST DETECTOR

87%
Dyson
Gen5detect Absolute

Dyson’s latest stick vacuum is a great performer with some handy features. A bar graph on its LCD screen shows you how clean your floor is getting in ‘real time’. As you vacuum, three fluctuating bars relating to small, medium and large particles move higher and lower depending on how much debris is being removed. There’s also an optic LED light on its hard floor head to illuminate dirt, and a HEPA filter. At 0.5L the bin is slightly larger than the 0.3L on many other stick vacs but you’ll still need to empty it frequently. It’s also relatively heavy, at around 3.5kg. If you aren’t fussed about all the tech and are on a budget, there are cheaper recommended performers to consider instead.



BIN THERE, EMPTIED THAT

84%
Samsung Bespoke Jet
VS20A95943B_SA

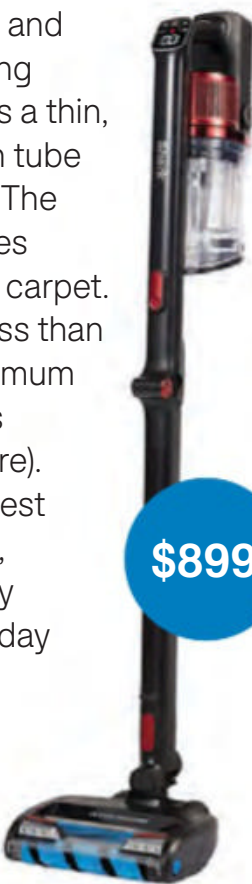
Samsung is one of only two stick vac brands we’ve tested so far that comes with an automatic emptying bin, which charges and empties the stick vacuum into a disposable bin bag held within the charging dock. This saves you from having to empty the dust canister directly into a bin and holds around 2.2L – the equivalent of five to six stick vacuum bins. However, the bin bags use a thick plastic and we’d like to see a more sustainable replacement. Performance-wise, the vac holds its own with the LGs and the Dysons we’ve recommended, with excellent pet hair and hard-floor pick-up. There’s also an extra tool holder and ‘cradle’ that stores all the accessory tools neatly and even charges a spare battery.



EASY ACCESS

82%
Shark Cordless Apex
Pro X2 Pet Vacuum IZ320

Excellent at removing pet hair and cleaning hard floors, the Shark also has some unique features that make it easy to use for certain tasks. These include a flexible wand to get under low furniture, and practical car-cleaning accessories such as a thin, bendable extension tube and detailing tools. The cleaning head moves very easily over the carpet. The battery lasts less than ten minutes in maximum mode (although it is supplied with a spare). At 4kg it’s the heaviest stick vac in our test, so although it’s easy to use during everyday operation it may be unsuitable for reaching up high if you have weaker hands.



Shop Ethical rating

BRAND	RATING
Beko	D
Bissell	C
Black & Decker	C
Bosch	D
Dyson	D
Electrolux	C
LG	F
Miele	B
Roborock	F
Samsung	F
Vax	C
Xiaomi	F

NOTES:
Other brands in our review not mentioned here don’t have a Shop Ethical rating. For more on Shop Ethical ratings and what they mean, see p73.

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend stick vacs with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 80%, as long as they also score at least 70% for hard floor dirt pick-up. **Price** RRP as of November 2022. **CHOICE Expert Rating** consists of hard floor dirt pick-up (30%), ease of use (30%), pet hair removal (15%), quick carpet clean (15%), and thorough carpet clean (10%). *Also sold as Dyson V15 Detect Absolute for \$1199 without the mini soft dusting brush and stubborn dirt brush. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. ■

			Performance									Specifications							
Recommended		Price (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Hard floor dirt pick-up score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Pet hair removal score (%)	Quick cleaning on carpet score (%)	Thorough carpet cleaning score (%)	Car cleaning score (%)	Noise (dBA)	Hard floor head	Swappable battery	Handheld as well	Claimed charge time (hr)	Measured dust collector (L)	Measured run time on high (min)	Weight (kg)	Origin	
✓	Dyson Gen5detect Absolute	1499	87	90	81	100	80	89	90	72	✓	✓	✓	3.5	0.5	12	3.5	Malaysia	
✓	Dyson V15 Detect Total Clean*	1399	86	83	82	100	81	91	90	69	✓	✓	✓	4.5	0.5	12	3.1	Malaysia	
✓	Dyson V12 Detect Slim Absolute	999	85	90	81	90	79	88	90	73	✓	✓	✓	3.5	0.2	6	24	Malaysia	
✓	LG A9N-Multi	949	84	83	82	100	75	81	90	74	✓	✓	✓	4	0.4	7	26	Vietnam	
✓	LG A9T-Ultra	1699	84	83	83	100	75	80	90	73	✓	✓	✓	4	0.4	8	2.7	Korea	
✓	Roborock H7	899	84	77	85	100	79	86	90	70			✓	2.5	0.4	10	2.5	China	
✓	Samsung Bespoke Jet VS20A95943B_SA	1299	84	90	81	90	76	78	90	73	✓	✓	✓	3.5	0.4	9	2.8	Vietnam	
✓	Dyson Outsize Total Clean	1399	82	83	78	100	71	80	60	73	✓	✓	✓	4.5	1.6	12	3.6	Malaysia	
✓	Shark Cordless Apex Pro X2 Pet Vacuum IZ320	899	82	90	82	90	64	68	90	76		✓	✓	4	1	9	4.0	China	
✓	Xiaomi Mi Vacuum Cleaner G10	500	82	70	85	100	77	85	80	74		✓	✓	4	0.4	13	2.9	China	
✓	Dyson Cyclone V10 Animal	899	81	73	81	100	74	85	90	78			✓	3.5	0.5	8	2.6	Malaysia	
✓	Tineco Pure One S12 Platinum 165-1873-2301	1099	81	83	78	100	68	77	90	69	✓	✓	✓	4	0.5	8	2.9	China	
✓	LG A9K-Core	1299	80	83	79	100	63	71	90	71	✓	✓	✓	3.5	0.4	8	2.7	Korea	
✓	LG CordZero A9K-Ultra	1559	80	83	79	100	65	71	90	73	✓	✓	✓	3.5	0.4	7	2.7	Korea	
	Bosch Athlet BCH6AT25AU/02	379	79	80	67	100	75	82	na	73				6	0.4	10	3.3	China	
	Bosch Zoo'o ProAnimal BCH6ZOOAU/02	529	79	80	72	100	69	77	90	73			✓	6	0.4	11	3.3	China	
	Dyson V8	799	79	70	82	90	76	81	80	72			✓	5	0.3	8	2.5	Malaysia	
	Wertheim Evolution	799	79	77	81	100	65	70	80	76		✓	✓	4-5	0.5	7	2.8	China	
	Dyson V11	1199	78	63	81	100	76	86	90	74		✓	✓	3.5	0.5	13	3.0	Malaysia	
	Samsung Jet 70 Pet	599	78	73	80	100	65	71	80	71		✓	✓	3.5	0.6	6	2.6	Vietnam	
	Bosch Unlimited Series 6	429	77	77	84	90	57	64	90	70		✓	✓	4-5	0.3	10	2.4	Germany	
	Dreame Cordless Vacuum T30 VTT1	899	77	73	82	90	67	74	80	74		✓	✓	4	0.4	11	2.7	China	
	Beko PowerClean Cordless Stick Vacuum Cleaner	599	76	63	83	90	72	79	90	71	✓	✓	✓	4-5	0.6	10	2.9	China	
	Miele Triflex HX2 Pro SOML0	1299	76	63	83	90	68	80	90	69	✓	✓	✓	4	0.3	12	3.7	Germany	
	Sauber Technic Stick Vacuum	399	76	83	79	90	53	57	80	76	✓	✓	✓	ns	0.3	11	2.2	China	
	Shark Cordless Vacuum with Self Cleaning Brushroll	650	76	80	80	90	57	63	70	73		✓	✓	3	0.9	12	3.4	China	
	Bosch Unlimited Series 6 ProAnimal	579	75	70	78	90	66	73	90	72		✓	✓	4-5	0.3	9	2.3	Germany	
	i-Vac Ultra Pets Plus Stick Vacuum	399	75	73	81	90	57	63	90	70		✓	✓	4	0.5	15	2.4	China	
	Bissell Pet Hair Eraser Slim Cordless 3-in-1 2907F	399	74	80	80	90	48	54	90	65			✓	5	0.5	16	3.7	China	
	Black & Decker PowerSeries Extreme 4in1	219	74	67	78	90	66	71	20	77		✓	✓	5	0.5	11	3.1	China	
	Electrolux Well Q7 WQ71-P5OIB	599	74	77	76	90	53	62	80	67	✓		✓	4.5	0.3	16	3.0	China	
	Miele Triflex HX1 SMUL1	799	74	63	83	90	64	70	90	68		✓	✓	4	0.3	14	3.7	Germany	
	Tineco Pure One X	499	74	77	79	90	55	59	80	67			✓	3-4	0.4	11	2.3	China	
	Vax Reach VX92	169	74	83	80	70	56	60	70	74			✓	3	0.5	15	3.0	China	
	Beko PowerClean Pro 2-in-1 Rechargeable Stick Vacuum VRT 94129 VI	729	73	73	82	90	52	55	80	68	✓	✓	✓	4-5	0.5	9	3.3	China	
	Electrolux Ergorapido Allergy ZB3515ST	399	73	73	77	90	55	62	80	69			✓	4	0.3	15	2.5	China	
	i-Vac Ultra Light Plus	249	73	63	85	90	56	62	80	80		✓	✓	5.6	0.5	19	2.2	China	
	Black & Decker Smarttech Pet 2 in 1	180	72	83	74	90	45	51	80	79			✓	6	0.6	11	2.5	China	
	Bosch Athlet Serie 6 ProAnimal 28V Max	579	72	67	74	90	62	69	20	68				6	0.4	20	3.4	China	
	Invictus X9 Plus X-Water 2.0	1240	71	83	82	60	49	54	80	75	✓	✓	✓	2.3	0.5	10	2.7	China	
	Electrolux Pure Q9	649	68	77	78	70	41	45	70	71			✓	4	0.2	15	2.7	China	



Reading the signs

Knowing which wash cycle to use is easy – if you can interpret those mysterious clothes washing symbols! **Ashley Iredale** is here to translate

Cotton, silk, linen, wool, rayon, lycra – our clothes are made from a huge number of different materials, and just as they have different properties, so too do they have different requirements in the wash.

But how do you know what you need to do to take the best care of your new shirt or slacks? The care instructions written on the garment tags will tell you, you just have to learn how to read them.

Symbols are used rather than words to convey information irrespective of language

When it comes to caring for your clothes, symbols developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) are used rather than words to convey information irrespective of language.

The symbols are all based on a handful of basic shapes relating to a different aspect of garment care. Each symbol then has modifiers denoting a specific meaning, but the most common – an X or cross – has an almost universal meaning: don't do it.



Washing temperature



A symbol of a tub with a number or dots indicates maximum wash temperature.

- One dot denotes a cold wash.
- Two dots denotes a warm wash.
- Three dots indicates hot water.
- A tub with a number in it gives you more precise temperature guidance and can range from 30–95°C. Remember, that's the maximum temperature – you can always wash in cold (or even just colder) water, and save on your energy bill.

Wash, rinse & spin



A tub with water indicates wash, rinse and spin intensity. Garments with this symbol shouldn't be wrung out by hand.

- A plain tub indicates the garment can be spun and rinsed as normal.
- A bar under the tub means use a low spin speed.
- Two bars under the tub means a gentle wash action is needed, but spin and rinse normally.
- An X through the tub means the garment shouldn't be washed and may need dry cleaning instead.

Handwashing



The symbol for handwash only is, unsurprisingly, a hand. This indicates you should wash the garment item by hand at 40°C or lower.

Alternatively, you can use your washing machine's handwash program if it has one – this is a gentle program suitable for delicate fabrics.

Wringing



If you do handwash your item, or pull it out of the washer before the spin cycle, check if the label carries a symbol that looks like a twisted knot – this indicates hand wringing. Wringing out your clothes can help get the water out, but it has the potential to seriously damage the fibres in the fabric, so don't ignore this symbol.

- A twisted knot symbol means the garment can be wrung out without damage.
- An X over the symbol means the garment should not be wrung out.

Dry cleaning



A circle symbol relates to dry cleaning. Some dry cleaning symbols are for the benefit of the dry cleaner.

- A circle means the item can be dry cleaned.
- Letters inside the circle (e.g. P, A, F) tell the dry cleaner which chemical and method to use.
- An X over the circle indicates the garment should not be dry cleaned.
- A diagonal line at the bottom left of the circle denotes short cycle.
- A diagonal line at the bottom right of the circle denotes low heat.

Bleaching



- A triangle symbol relates to bleach.
- A clear triangle means any type of bleach can be used on the fabric.
- A triangle with two slanted lines means use a non-chlorine or oxygen-based bleach. Alternatively, the label may state "No Chlorine Bleach".
- An X over a triangle means Do Not Bleach.

Not all garments will carry a bleach symbol, but that doesn't mean open season. You should never use bleach on wool, silk or leather garments. ▶



What about drying?

How you dry your clothes is also dictated by the clothing care symbols. Keep an eye out for these before throwing everything into the dryer.

Clothes dryer



A square with a circle in it indicates clothes dryer drying. The dots indicate heat levels.

- One dot – use low heat.
- Two dots – use medium heat.
- Three dots – use high heat.
- An X over the symbol means the garment is not suitable for the clothes dryer.

Line-drying



- A square relates to line drying.
- A drooping line inside the square means you can hang your clothes outside to dry.
 - Three vertical lines inside the square means drip dry indoors on a clothes horse or rack.
 - One horizontal line indicates you should lay the garment flat to keep its shape while it dries.

Shop Ethical rating

BRAND	RATING
AEG	C
Asko	F
Beko	D
Electrolux	D
Fisher & Paykel	C
Haier	F
Kmart	C
LG	F
Miele	B
Samsung	F
Westinghouse	C

NOTES: Other brands in our review not mentioned here don't have a Shop Ethical rating. For more on Shop Ethical ratings and what they mean, see p73.



Do you have to follow laundry care symbols exactly?

Cleaning your clothes correctly is key to keeping them fresh and looking their best for a long time – getting it wrong in the laundry means they won't go the distance, and you could even destroy them completely in one wash.

Most clothing manufacturers recommend the most conservative cleaning methods to minimise the risk of damage to your clothes, so you may not always need to follow care instructions religiously. For instance, a fabric labelled as 'dry

clean only' may be perfectly safe for hand washing.

But there's a risk of fading, shrinking or otherwise damaging clothes if you mistreat them in the wash, especially when it comes

to bleaching or tumble drying. Paying attention to the material your garment is made of will help you make an informed decision about how much (or little) leeway you have. ■



TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend front loaders with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 80%, and at least 80% for dirt removal. We recommend top loaders with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 70%, and at least 70% for dirt removal. We don't recommend machines with less than 55% in any score. **Price** Recommended retail price as of November 2022. **Running costs** Water and electricity costs over 10 years for washing one load a day on a normal cycle, based on 30c/kWh of electricity and \$2 per 1000L for water. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of dirt removal (40%), rinse performance (20%), gentleness (15%), water efficiency (15%) and spin efficiency (10%). **Brand reliability** Where available, taken from our 2021 Brand Reliability Survey, but doesn't contribute to the CHOICE Expert Rating. These scores refer to the brand only, not the particular model. **Cold** Machines connect to cold water only. **H & C** Needs both hot and cold water to operate. **Dimensions** These are for the smallest box that fits around the machine, as stated by the manufacturer. **na** Not available..

		COSTS		PERFORMANCE									SPECIFICATIONS			
Recommended		Price (\$)	Running costs/10 years (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Dirt removal score (%)	Rinse performance score (%)	Gentleness score (%)	Water efficiency score (%)	Spin efficiency score (%)	Brand reliability score (%)	Water used (L, normal cycle)	Cycle time (min, normal wash)	Woolens cycle (machine / hand washable)	Tap connection	Capacity (kg)	Claimed dimensions (cm, H x W x D)
FRONT LOADERS																
✓	Bosch WGA244U0AU	1499	624	83	86	93	66	86	75	90	45	222	✓ / ✓	Cold	9	85 x 60 x 59
✓	LG WV9-1412W	1799	1042	83	87	96	63	82	68	88	52	278	✓ / ✓	H & C	12	85 x 60 x 66
✓	Miele WCA 020	1549	526	83	83	91	72	88	79	86	41	158	✓ / ✓	Cold	7	85 x 60 x 64
✓	Miele WWD 120	2049	606	83	84	96	63	85	76	86	48	160	✓ / ✓	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 65
✓	Bosch WAW28440AU	1849	579	82	84	92	60	88	73	90	42	215	✓ / ✓	Cold	9	85 x 60 x 59
✓	LG WV9-1409W	1299	907	82	85	93	62	83	80	88	51	235	✓ / ✓	H & C	9	85 x 60 x 56
✓	Miele WWG360 WCS	2799	658	82	81	94	63	86	80	86	46	186	✓ / ✓	Cold	9	85 x 60 x 65
✓	Miele WWG660	2799	660	82	85	96	57	84	78	86	49	158	✓ / ✓	Cold	9	85 x 60 x 65
✓	Samsung WW12TP54DSH/SA	1449	750	82	84	89	61	86	81	87	46	159	✓ / –	H & C	12	85 x 60 x 65
✓	Samsung WW85T554DAW	949	819	82	83	96	59	80	84	87	55	166	✓ / –	H & C	8.5	85 x 60 x 55
✓	Samsung WW95T754DBT	1249	969	81	84	98	56	72	87	87	70	167	✓ / –	H & C	9.5	85 x 60 x 60
✓	AEG LF8C8412A	1999	666	80	80	95	64	77	77	79	61	129	✓ / ✓	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 63
	Beko BFL7510W	949	626	79	84	89	56	81	67	79	54	132	✓ / ✓	Cold	7.5	84 x 60 x 64
	Electrolux EWF9042R7WB	1499	748	78	78	95	61	72	78	82	71	136	✓ / ✓	Cold	9	85 x 60 x 66
	Fisher & Paykel WH1160F2	1999	713	78	79	97	55	74	73	82	66	111	✓ / –	H & C	11	85 x 60 x 68
	Fisher & Paykel WH8060J3	999	629	78	78	93	62	78	69	82	59	124	– / –	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 59
	Fisher & Paykel WH8060P3	1099	823	78	81	97	56	71	73	82	72	127	✓ / –	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 65
	Fisher & Paykel WH9060P3	1299	851	78	80	97	56	70	78	82	74	127	✓ / –	Cold	9	85 x 60 x 66
	Fisher & Paykel WH1060P3	1399	904	77	80	98	53	66	76	82	81	126	✓ / ✓	Cold	10	85 x 60 x 66
	LG WV6-1409W	1319	943	77	81	92	49	79	73	88	58	176	✓ / ✓	Cold	9	85 x 60 x 57
	Westinghouse WWF8024M5WA	1099	692	77	78	95	61	74	69	na	67	118	✓ / –	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 66
	Solt GGSFLW60	499	780	76	80	83	57	83	67	na	51	226	✓ / –	Cold	6	85 x 60 x 50
	Asko W4086P.W.AU	2299	459	74	73	75	63	87	77	79	43	75	✓ / ✓	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 59
	Haier HWF75AN1	849	458	73	69	82	70	85	60	na	48	60	– / –	Cold	7.5	85 x 60 x 61
TOP LOADERS																
	LG WTG1434VHF	1599	753	73	80	85	35	73	79	88	69	91	– / –	H & C	14	103 x 69 x 73
	Fisher & Paykel WL1068P1	1999	839	70	71	91	46	58	73	82	95	55	– / –	H & C	10	106 x 69 x 70
	Haier XPB60-287S (Twin tub)	799	758	69	75	90	35	65	63	na	82	74	– / –	H & C	6	92 x 74 x 44
	LG WTG6520	935	956	67	73	94	49	45	53	88	120	58	✓ / –	H & C	6.5	96 x 59 x 61
	LG WTG7520	959	834	67	70	93	41	56	56	88	98	58	✓ / –	H & C	7.5	96 x 59 x 61
	Fisher & Paykel WA8560G1	1299	987	66	65	96	49	45	69	82	119	43	✓ / –	H & C	8.5	108 x 60 x 60
	Haier HWT09AN1	1099	856	66	65	90	52	53	59	na	104	57	✓ / –	H & C	9	102 x 58 x 59
	Haier HWT80AW1	949	929	65	65	93	46	52	54	na	106	55	✓ / –	H & C	8	97 x 58 x 59
	Haier HWT08AN1	999	1174	64	68	95	47	31	56	na	145	68	✓ / –	H & C	8	102 x 58 x 59
	Fisher & Paykel WA1068G2	1599	1318	63	64	98	48	21	70	82	162	53	– / –	H & C	10	105 x 69 x 70
	Samsung WA12A8376GV	1299	1060	63	64	93	51	37	56	87	134	59	– / –	H & C	12	114 x 70 x 75
	Haier HWT60AA1	609	1186	61	58	98	48	33	63	na	140	61	– / –	H & C	6	91 x 52 x 57
	Kmart Anko ATW80G	419	1628	61	72	99	49	1	46	na	199	87	– / –	H & C	8	97 x 58 x 60
	Samsung WA90T6250BW	799	1136	61	61	95	50	31	55	87	145	61	– / –	H & C	9	108 x 64 x 71
	Westinghouse WWT8084J7WA	1149	902	59	44	89	53	59	68	na	94	56	– / –	H & C	8	110 x 67 x 72



NEED TO KNOW

- Despite a plethora of portable air con models on the market, most don't perform well compared to split-system options.
- You can improve their performance by taking care of the draughts and spaces that let in hot air.

A spot of cooling

Portable air conditioners have their place, but don't expect too much from them, warns **Matthew Steen**

Every time we review portable air conditioners we're struck by how poorly they perform in comparison to split-system air conditioners. If electric heaters are spot heaters in many cases, portable air cons could be considered 'spot coolers'.

On the plus side, they don't need any hard-wired installation, so your landlord doesn't need to give you permission to install it.

It's also important to note that 'portable' in our language is slightly

different to a manufacturer's idea of portable.

You can install these units without modification to your building, but you generally wouldn't want to lug one from room to room the way you do with a fan. They're heavy (sometimes up to 40kg), not always easy to manoeuvre, and require installation to your window using the supplied kit.

'Portable' in our language is slightly different to a manufacturer's idea of portable

Energy-hungry cooling

Portable air conditioners work basically the same way as built-in air conditioning: sucking in warm and

humid air, cooling and dehumidifying it, and blowing it back into the room.

Single-duct models, with a duct connected to a window to vent heat from the room, can be effective at cooling most of the room, but they draw the air from the room (in order to cool it) and vent some of it outside.

Venting the hot air outside through the duct results in lower air pressure in the room, which leads to more warm air being drawn in from the rest of the house. This is one reason why portable air conditioners are not considered particularly efficient. And since the whole unit including the motor (which gets hot during use) and the ducting is inside the room you're trying to cool, reheating the room, it



faces a continual struggle to cool the room. A venting kit is usually included so you can seal the gap around the duct to stop the cool air escaping.

Finding the right size

The cooling capacity of a portable air conditioner is measured in kW (kilowatts). For every extra kW you have more cooling power, but it's also going to cost you more in energy.

Recommended room sizes are roughly based on the square metre floor space of your room, but this is very rough because it ignores height. Some portable air conditioners do give you an indication of the room size they'll cover, but not usually.

Multiply the width and depth of your room in metres and that will give you your dimensions in m². Each kW of cooling capacity is roughly equivalent to cooling 6m², so as a rough guide base your purchase on this requirement.

What to look for

Automatic louvres: Oscillating louvres direct cool air more widely, rather than just in a fixed direction.

Dehumidification: All portable air conditioners dehumidify the air – some use the collected water for further cooling, and some just direct the moisture to a tray you'll have to empty. If a manufacturer has provided a claimed dehumidification rate, we've listed it in the table (p67).

Ease of use: If you'll be moving the portable air conditioner around, look for easy to access handles and good clearance between the floor and the bottom of the unit. Smaller wheels on pile carpet can be a nuisance.

Power cord: Some cords can be quite short so consider access to a power point when deciding where to put the air conditioner. Don't use an extension cord as it may not cope with the extra power these appliances need.

Operating modes: Most models will come with three operating modes: cool, dry (dehumidify) or fan only. Reverse-cycle models also come with a heat mode.

Remote control: A large, clear LCD display and meaningful controls will make life easier. All models except the Hisense came with a remote control.

Wi-Fi: Generally means you can access controls via an app on your phone.

Timers: Useful to program the unit to turn on/off at certain times, such as cooling the place down before you get home from work.

Window kit: Filler panels are supplied to close the gap in an open window and direct hot air outside using an exhaust hose.



Noise

Portable air conditioners are also noisier indoors than most split-systems, which have the advantage of having the noisiest component, the compressor, situated outside.

Portable air conditioner units range from 57 to 70dBA on full blast. That's louder than a normal conversation (which is about 65dBA). ▶



\$919

79% Midea MPPD30C

This model has an excellent cooling score and below average running costs compared to the others in our test – though its upfront price is at the higher end. It's rated as 'Noisy', but this is an average level for the portable air con units in our test. If you're planning on moving this unit around, note that at 32kg its weight is in the average range for the models we tested, but it has no castors.



\$1199

76% Olimpia Splendid Airpro 13 P Wi-Fi

This model's performance is similar to the top scoring Midea – the main difference is its very good cooling score, compared with the Midea's excellent rating. But the Airpro also has Wi-Fi connectivity, which lets you control temperature, fan speed, timers and on/off operation from your phone, and it comes with castors. Of the models that declare dehumidification rates, this claims the highest at 48L/day.



\$849

75% DeLonghi PAC AN112 Silent

Another model with a very good cooling score, but this one is also slightly cheaper to buy than others with comparable scores, while still being able to boast below-average running costs. However, despite its name, it's marginally noisier than the other two recommended models on high speed. It has castors for easier manoeuvrability, and dehumidification claims are around 41L/day.



Shop Ethical rating

BRAND	RATING	BRAND	RATING
Aldi	C	Midea	F
DeLonghi	D	Polo	B
ExcelAir	B	Rinnai	B
Hisense	F	TCL	D
Honeywell	F	Teco	B
Kogan	F	Vostok	B

NOTES Other brands in our review not mentioned here don't have a Shop Ethical rating. For more on Shop Ethical ratings and what they mean, see p73.

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend portable air conditioners with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 70% or more. **Price** Recommended retail as of November 2022. **Running cost** Based on operating the unit at average power consumption used in our tests, for four hours a day for three months in hot weather at 30c/kWh. **CHOICE Expert Rating** Made up of cooling (50%) and energy efficiency (50%). **Cooling score** This is a comparative measure of how well the portable air conditioner uses energy, including standby energy. **Energy efficiency score** This is a comparative measure of the energy input vs the cooling output. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. Three models in this test can also operate as a heater: Teco TPO35HFWDT, Arlec PA1206HA and Teco TPO32HFWDT. ■

Recommended		COSTS		PERFORMANCE							SPECIFICATIONS									
		Price (\$)	Running costs over summer (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Cooling score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Cooling capacity (kW)	Recommended room size (m ²)	Dehumidification (L/day)	Fan noise on high	Fan speeds	Wi-Fi	Automatic oscillating louvres	Timer	Handles / castors	Length of power cord (cm)	Length of exhaust duct (cm)	Max. length of window kit (cm)	Claimed dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)
✓	Midea MPPD30C	919	103	79	90	68	3.0	13–20	ns	Noisy	3			✓	✓ / –	ns	ns	ns	77 x 47 x 40	32
✓	Olimpia Splendid Airpro 13 P Wi-Fi	1199	103	76	84	68	2.9	ns	48	Noisy	3	✓		✓	✓ / ✓	ns	150	ns	77 x 49 x 43	32
✓	DeLonghi PAC AN112 Silent	849	103	75	82	67	2.9	20	41	Noisy	3			✓	✓ / ✓	ns	120	120	75 x 45 x 40	30
✓	DeLonghi PAC EL112 CST	899	103	75	82	67	2.9	23	41	Noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	110	120	100	75 x 45 x 41	32
✓	Excelair EPA14A	699	130	72	78	67	3.6	24	ns	Noisy	3			✓	✓ / ✓	180	150	150	79 x 42 x 42	34
	Rinnai RPC26MC	719	99	65	65	65	2.6	11–20	ns	Noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	120	180	125	71 x 47 x 38	32
	Honeywell HM14CESWK	979	158	64	63	64	4.1	20–28	ns	Very noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	180	150	100	72 x 44 x 36	34
	TCL TAC-12CPB/NZ	599	139	64	63	64	3.6	ns	ns	Noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	ns	ns	ns	75 x 45 x 40	33
	Vostok VOSPAC14KWA	499	158	64	63	64	4.1	25	36	Very noisy	3	✓		✓	✓ / ✓	ns	ns	ns	72 x 44 x 36	29
	DeLonghi PAC CN93ECO	699	100	63	62	64	2.6	20	36	Noisy	3			✓	✓ / ✓	ns	120	ns	75 x 50 x 40	30
	Excelair EPA101A	499	100	63	62	64	2.6	18	ns	Noisy	2			✓	✓ / ✓	180	150	100	75 x 38 x 31	22
	Inalto IAP3800W	699	151	60	56	63	3.8	25	ns	Noisy	4		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	ns	ns	ns	77 x 47 x 40	32
	Midea MPPD35C	959	151	60	56	63	3.8	17–25	ns	Noisy	3			✓	✓ / –	ns	ns	ns	77 x 47 x 40	33
	Onix ON-19KWPA	309	76	60	56	63	1.9	ns	ns	Very noisy	3			✓	✓ / ✓	ns	ns	ns	68 x 33 x 28	19
	Teco TPO35HFWDT	1049	139	60	57	63	3.5	ns	46	Noisy	3	✓	✓	✓	✓ / ✓	ns	150	ns	75 x 45 x 40	36
	Aldi Stirling PA27W	349	108	59	55	63	2.7	20	ns	Very noisy	2			✓	✓ / ✓	ns	ns	ns	70 x 34 x 30	25
	Polo PQ10C	799	108	59	55	63	2.7	12–20	ns	Quieter	2		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	120	145	123	78 x 45 x 38	31
	Rinnai RPC41NC	949	164	59	55	63	4.1	13–30	ns	Noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	120	180	125	74 x 45 x 40	39
	Teco TPO41CFWUDT	1099	164	59	55	63	4.1	ns	43	Noisy	3	✓	✓	✓	✓ / ✓	ns	ns	ns	75 x 45 x 40	34
	Aldi Stirling PA19W	299	77	58	53	63	1.9	10–14	ns	Very noisy	2	✓		✓	✓ / ✓	ns	ns	ns	69 x 32 x 29	20
	Arlec PA1206HA	499	133	58	54	63	3.3	25	ns	Noisy	3	✓	✓	✓	✓ / ✓	170	ns	ns	72 x 45 x 37	31
	DeLonghi PAC EM93 Silent	779	105	58	54	63	2.6	20	50	Noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	110	120	100	70 x 43 x 35	30
	Excelair EPA16A	799	162	58	53	63	4.0	28	ns	Noisy	3			✓	✓ / –	180	150	150	79 x 42 x 42	34
	Midea MPPD33C	939	133	58	54	63	3.3	16–23	ns	Noisy	3			✓	✓ / –	ns	ns	ns	77 x 47 x 40	33
	Olimpia Splendid Procool 16E	1499	189	58	53	63	4.7	ns	48	Noisy	3			✓	✓ / ✓	ns	150	ns	78 x 48 x 39	32
	Omega Altise OAPC147	749	166	58	53	62	4.1	ns	ns	Very noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	ns	ns	ns	72 x 44 x 34	29
	Polo PC47C	999	189	58	54	63	4.7	13–33	ns	Noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	120	150	123	77 x 57 x 36	43
	Teco TPO32HFWDT	999	133	58	54	63	3.3	ns	36	Noisy	3	✓	✓	✓	✓ / ✓	ns	150	ns	72 x 45 x 37	31
	Teco TPO47CFBT	1199	189	58	54	63	4.7	ns	43	Noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	ns	ns	ns	78 x 58 x 39	42
	Hisense HPA27C	749	110	57	51	62	2.7	ns	24	Noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	ns	150	ns	75 x 44 x 38	39
	Olimpia Splendid Comfort 14	1099	167	57	52	62	4.1	25	36	Very noisy	3			✓	✓ / ✓	ns	150	ns	69 x 44 x 36	30
	Rinnai RPC35MC	849	138	57	52	62	3.4	11–24	ns	Very noisy	3		✓	✓	✓ / ✓	120	180	125	71 x 47 x 38	38

Mow-ing with the times



Gone are the days when the trusty 2-stroke mower was the only option for looking after your lawn, says **Ashley Iredale**

For more than half a century that noisy, smelly 2-stroke (or one like it) was the only real option for beating back the Blue Couch. These days petrol mowers are thankfully all 4-stroke and take regular petrol. But battery technology has also come a long way and the right choice for your garden maintenance is no longer clear-cut (pun intended).

Petrol mowers

The tried and true workhorses of lawn care, petrol mowers usually do an excellent job of taming the toughest jobs and they're quick to refuel,

so they're a good option for large lawns. But they can also be a hassle to start, the fuel is highly flammable, and they can be noisy and smelly.

Battery (cordless) mowers

Battery mowers are safer than petrol models (there's no volatile fuel to deal with), quieter, and are easier to start as they use a pushbutton rather than a pullcord. But battery life is an added consideration. You can't just fill up the fuel tank and go like you can with a petrol mower. Unless you have a spare battery or two (and these

Battery technology has come a long way and the right choice for garden maintenance is no longer clear-cut

NEED TO KNOW

- Petrol mowers offer plenty of power and fast refuelling, but can be noisy, smelly and hard to start.
- Battery mowers are now serious contenders, but you may need a spare battery or two to tackle bigger lawns.

can be costly), it can take a few hours to charge one up again. And if you forget to keep the battery charged you may miss your mowing window entirely.

The good news is, many manufacturers now offer a battery 'system', with batteries compatible with multiple tools – which is very convenient if you also have a line trimmer, drill, or other cordless tools, as you may have a suitable spare battery already. Better yet, if you already have batteries you can usually buy the mower without the battery – (baretool or skin-tool) – and save a pretty penny.

Robot mowers

The new battery-operated kid on the quarter-acre block is the robot lawnmower. Much smaller than a conventional lawnmower, the robot mower consists of the main mower unit and a charging dock. There's no catcher, as a robot mower cuts the lawn fine enough to distribute the grass back into the lawn.

They're expensive compared to most conventional lawnmowers and some can equal the cost of a ride-on mower. They're suitable for lawns up to 5000 square metres (sqm), but all require a little bit of set-up to get to their reasonably autonomous state.

BEST BATTERY MOWER



\$899

93%

Ego Power+
LM1704E-SP

BEST BATTERY MOWER ON A BUDGET



\$329

85%

Ryobi One+
RLM18X33S40

BEST ROBOT MOWER



\$2039

86%

Husqvarna
Automower 310 Mark II

The **Stihl RMI 632** scored the same, but costs almost \$1000 more. However, you also need to consider lawn size. The Stihl RMI 632 mows up to 3000sqm, whereas this Husqvarna model only does up to 1200sqm.

BEST PETROL MOWER



\$1099

90%

Honda
HRN216VKU

The **Aldi Ferrex** performed better and was much cheaper, but as a 'special buy' it may not be available at the time you wish to purchase.

BEST PETROL MOWER ON A BUDGET



\$479

88%

Victa Classic Cut
Anniversary Edition

The **Bushranger** is cheaper and scores the same, but it's not *much* cheaper and it doesn't offer mulching.

Mowers with mulchers

Mulching mowers produce more of a compost than a mulch, using a special 'mulching plug' to repeatedly feed the cut grass back through the blades, chopping it very finely before forcing the clippings back into the lawn.

Mulcher mowers typically cost a little more, but a good mulcher mower makes your lawn look neat and tidy and you shouldn't be able to see clumps of clippings or unmown grass after you've finished. Best of all, you don't need to keep emptying the catcher, and the grass clippings fertilise your lawn. ▶





BATTERY LAWNMOWERS			PERFORMANCE							SPECIFICATIONS										
Recommended		Price (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Cutting score with catcher (%)	Cutting score with mulcher (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise at 7.5m (dBA)	Noise at user position (dBA)	Battery life (minutes)	Mulcher	Self-propelled	Battery voltage (V)	Battery capacity (Ah)	Claimed charging time (minutes)	Cutting positions	Cutting height range, measured (mm)	Width of cut (cm)	Closeness of cut to a vertical edge (front / right / left, mm)	Main body material	Weight with battery (kg)
✓	Ego Power+ 42cm Cordless LM1704E-SP	899	93	95	100	89	66	80	55	✓	✓	56	5	100	7	30–85	42	140 / 20 / 20	P	26
✓	Ego Power 56V 52cm Select Cut LM2135E-SP	1249	92	97	100	86	66	80	45	✓	✓	56	7.5	60	7	25–90	52	150 / 25 / 40	P	30
✓	Stihl RMA 510V with AP300 & AL300	1077	92	97	95	87	64	80	74	✓	✓	36	6	60	8	25–100	51	130 / 25 / 40	S	30
✓	DeWalt DCMW564P2-XE	699	91	97	100	84	65	85	21	✓		2x18	5	75	5	35–85	49	130 / 20 / 15	S	26
✓	Ego Power+ LM1903E-SP Kit	1049	91	97	95	86	63	81	58	✓	✓	56	5	40	7	30–80	46	130 / 25 / 25	P	26
✓	Masport 450 ST 2n1 ELi 58V 0.75kW 578741	999	90	97	95	84	67	82	54	✓		58	4	120	10	10–75	46	100 / 35 / 15	S	23
✓	Stihl RMA 443 C	1117	90	97	na	83	59	77	72	O		36	4.8	45	6	25–75	41	165 / 30 / 40	P	23
✓	DeWalt DCMW564T2-XE	829	89	97	95	81	68	88	32	✓		2x18	6	60	5	40–95	49	125 / 25 / 20	S	25
✓	Victa 18" Twin Mightycut 18V 2691857	748	89	97	na	80	66	82	41			2x18	5	110	7	25–75	46	90 / 45 / 25	S	23
✓	Husqvarna LC347iVX with BiL200 & QC500	1393	88	93	na	83	62	78	39	O	✓	36	5.2	ns	6	30–80	47	140 / 30 / 25	P	30
	Stihl RMA 510	868	88	95	100	79	58	76	38	✓		36	6	75	7	35–85	51	135 / 20 / 20	S	28
✓	Bosch CityMower 18	419	87	92	na	82	60	75	28			18	4	95	3	30–60	32	135 / 15 / 15	P	10
✓	Bushranger 36V Battery Powered 16" BRU36V9501	629	87	95	83	85	62	77	64	✓		36	5	128	7	30–80	40	85 / 55 / 45	S	20
	Makita 18Vx2 Brushless 21" DLM535PG2	998	87	97	100	76	66	83	32	✓		2x18	6	60	10	30–115	53	165 / 35 / 20	S	38
✓	Makita DLM432CT2 Combo Kit	698	87	92	na	82	64	81	53	O		2x18	5	110	12	20–75	43	130 / 15 / 15	P	17
✓	Stihl RMA 460	860	87	93	93	80	65	81	30	✓		36	5	160–205	7	40–100	46	130 / 35 / 30	S	24
	Masport 42V ST S18 578744	696	86	93	na	79	67	81	33			42	4	90	10	20–85	46	135 / 50 / 15	S	23
	Victa 16" Twin Powercut 18V 900W Kit 2691856	647	86	93	na	79	56	76	59			2x18	5	110	7	30–70	39	110 / 50 / 50	S	20
	Ryobi One+ RLM18X33S40	329	85	92	na	77	59	77	34			18	4	160	5	30–75	33	165 / 25 / 25	P	11
✓	Ryobi RLM36X46BL	499	85	87	na	83	60	76	64			36	4	50	5	25–70	46	140 / 15 / 15	P	17
	AEG ALM58LI402	899	84	97	90	74	61	79	34	✓		58	4	65	7	27–75	46	175 / 35 / 10	S	27
	Masport President 1000 ST S18 Combo 578729	999	84	95	90	76	65	77	48	✓		58	4.3	120	10	15–85	46	130 / 40 / 15	S	23
	Stanley FatMax 2 x 18V 51cm Push SFMCMW2651M	619	84	93	na	74	59	76	70			2x18	4	120	5	25–60	49	140 / 35 / 30	P	17
✓	Toro 22" Recycler 60V Max 21864	1599	84	97	70	85	68	82	38	✓	✓	60	6	ns	5	35–100	54	160 / 30 / 25	S	35
	Redback E137C	439	82	92	na	72	65	80	58			40	6	ns	5	25–70	37	135 / 40 / 40	P	16
	Ozito PXC 18V PXCLMK-1418	249	80	92	na	67	61	76	27			18	4	75	3	35–70	31	135 / 30 / 25	P	9
✓	Toro Recycler 55cm 21863	1599	80	94	60	82	62	81	72	✓	✓	60	6	150	5	30–100	55	160 / 30 / 25	S	34

TABLE NOTES PETROL AND BATTERY MOWERS Recommended We recommend battery models with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 80% or more and at least 80% for ease of use, and petrol models with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 85% or more, and at least 75% for ease of use. **Price** RRP as of December 2022. **Scores** Models with catcher and mulcher modes: CHOICE Expert Rating comprises cutting score with catcher (25%), cutting score with mulcher (25%) and ease of use (50%). Catcher-only mowers: CHOICE Expert Rating comprises cutting score with catcher (50%) and ease of use (50%). **Mulcher O** Optional. **Self-propelled** Engine drives motor and blades. **Battery capacity** For the battery supplied or used for testing; some batteries are part of a battery system or family and are compatible with other garden tools. **Starter location H** Handle, **M** Motor. **Motor B&S** Briggs & Stratton, **G** Generic, **HO** Honda, **HU** Husqvarna, **K** Kohler, **L** Loncin, **R** Rover, **V** Victa. **Main body material A** Alloy, **S** Steel, **P** Plastic. **ns** Not stated. **na** Not applicable. **nt** Not tested.

PETROL LAWMOWERS			PERFORMANCE						SPECIFICATIONS									
Recommended		Price (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Cutting score with catcher (%)	Cutting score with mulcher (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise at 7.5m (dBA)	Noise at user's position (dBA)	Mulcher	Self-propelled	Starter location	Key start	Motor	Cutting positions	Width of cut, measured (cm)	Closeness of cut to a vertical edge, measured (front / right / left, mm)	Main body material	Weight (kg)
✓	Aldi Ferrex Pro 21" MS225-53E	399	93	98	100	86	73	88.5	✓	✓	H	✓	G	8	52	130 / 50 / 35	S	38
✓	Honda HRN216VKU	1099	90	98	100	80	71.5	85	✓	✓	H		HO	7	53	150 / 20 / 25	S	37
✓	Toro 22" Personal Pace All Wheel Drive 21472	1079	89	98	100	79	75	89	✓	✓	H		B&S	5	56	150 / 20 / 25	S	35
✓	Bushranger 46TB45 100N	449	88	98	na	77	67	84			H		B&S	10	45	110 / 20 / 15	S	28
✓	Honda HRU19 Buffalo Premium HRU19M2PKU	949	88	98	100	76	71	85	✓		H		HO	11	48	125 / 20 / 15	A	34
✓	Rover Duracut 855 MS	869	88	98	95	79	78	91	✓	✓	H		R	10	46	165 / 25 / 25	S	36
✓	Toro TimeMaster Electric Start 21200	2149	88	98	100	76	76	90	✓	✓	H	✓	B&S	6	76	220 / 30 / 30	S	74
✓	Victa Classic Cut Anniversary Edition	479	88	98	100	76	72	86	✓		M		V	10	45	165 / 50 / 15	S	27
✓	Victa Mustang 850 881925	1049	88	98	100	76	72	87	✓		M		B&S	10	48	155 / 20 / 25	A	32
	Bushranger 46TK6M	599	87	98	100	74	77	90	✓		H		K	10	45	115 / 20 / 20	S	32
	Honda HRU196M2PBUH	1299	87	98	100	74	75	88	✓		H		HO	11	47	145 / 30 / 25	A	39
✓	Husqvarna LC118	589	87	97	100	75	67	84	✓		H		HU	8	45	160 / 45 / 35	S	29
✓	Masport President 2000 ST S18 Combo	709	87	98	nt	76	nt	nt	✓		H		B&S	10	46	145 / 45 / 15	S	24
	Rover Duracut 900 11A-A1R6333	779	86	95	100	74	77	94	✓		H		R	6	54	110 / 25 / 15	S	28
	Masport Bunnings S18 470 2N1 565780	544	85	97	100	71	68	85	✓		M		B&S	10	46	110 / 45 / 15	S	25
✓	Victa Corvette 300 881895	749	85	80	100	79	70	85	✓		M		B&S	10	45	160 / 55 / 20	S	27
	Parklander Wallaby PCM4040L	539	84	97	na	71	70	82			H		L	10	46	110 / 40 / 30	S	30
	Yardking Compact 16" 2691804	369	84	95	na	72	69.5	84			H		G	7	40	120 / 50 / 45	S	20
	Husqvarna LC419SP	945	82	98	65	83	71	84.5	✓	✓	H		HU	8	37	190 / 35 / 30	A	35
	Masport Contractor ST S21 3'n1 SP 564929	1699	82	95	90	71	75	90	✓	✓	H		B&S	11	54	145 / 25 / 15	S	56

ROBOT LAWMOWERS			PERFORMANCE								SPECIFICATIONS									
Recommended		Price (\$)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Performance score (%)	Convenience score (%)	Noise score (%)	Instructions score (%)	Construction score (%)	Average working time (min)	Average charging time (min)	Automatically recharges	Alarm	Rain sensor	Battery capacity (Ah)	Battery type	Maximum lawn size (sqm)	Maximum slope (degrees)	Rated cutting width (cm)	Cutting height range (mm)	Mower weight (kg)
✓	Husqvarna Automower 310 Mark II	2039	86	87	82	73	100	100	70	80	✓	✓		2.1	18V Li-ion	1200	40	22	20–50	9.4
✓	Stihl RMI 632	2999	86	84	88	81	100	92	15	60	✓	✓	✓	2.9	29V Li-ion	3000	45	28	20–60	13.5
✓	Husqvarna Automower 105	1999	83	78	97	72	100	100	27	83	✓	✓		2.1	18V Li-ion	600	25	17	20–50	6.9
✓	Husqvarna Automower 405X	2549	83	84	80	69	100	100	50	80	✓	✓		2.0	18V Li-ion	720	40	22	20–50	9.7
	Husqvarna Automower 305	1699	78	74	88	76	100	71	25	80	✓	✓		2.1	18.5V Li-ion	600	40	22	20–50	9.4
	Stihl RMI 422 P	1999	77	72	86	82	100	75	31	70	✓	✓	✓	1.9	18V Li-ion	1500	40	20	20–60	10.0
	Gardena Sileno City 250	1299	73	70	74	64	100	92	29	77	✓			2.0	18V Li-ion	250	25	16	20–45	6.1
	Worx Landroid WR139E	1599	73	64	92	72	100	92	21	77	✓	✓	✓	2.0	20V Li-ion	500	35	18	30–60	9.6

TABLE NOTES ROBOT MOWERS Recommended We recommend robot models with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 80% or more. **Price** RRP as of December 2022. **CHOICE Expert Rating** comprises performance (60%), convenience (20%), noise (10%), instructions (5%) and construction (5%). ■

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* Indicates a correction or clarification (see Checkout).

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RATING	KEY
A	Praises, no criticism
B	Some praise, no criticism
C	Praises, some criticism
D	Criticism, some praise
F	Criticisms



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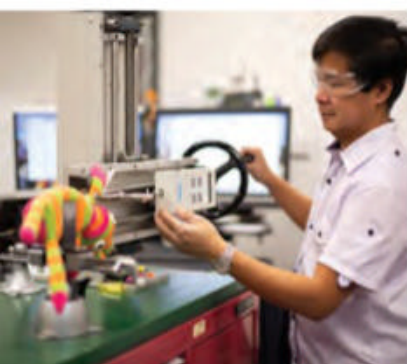
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NEXT
MONTH

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From electricity bills to greener vehicles, it's time to take back your power



Solar power

The newest panels on the block, and how they rate



Electricity costs

Your rights when you can't pay, and how to switch providers

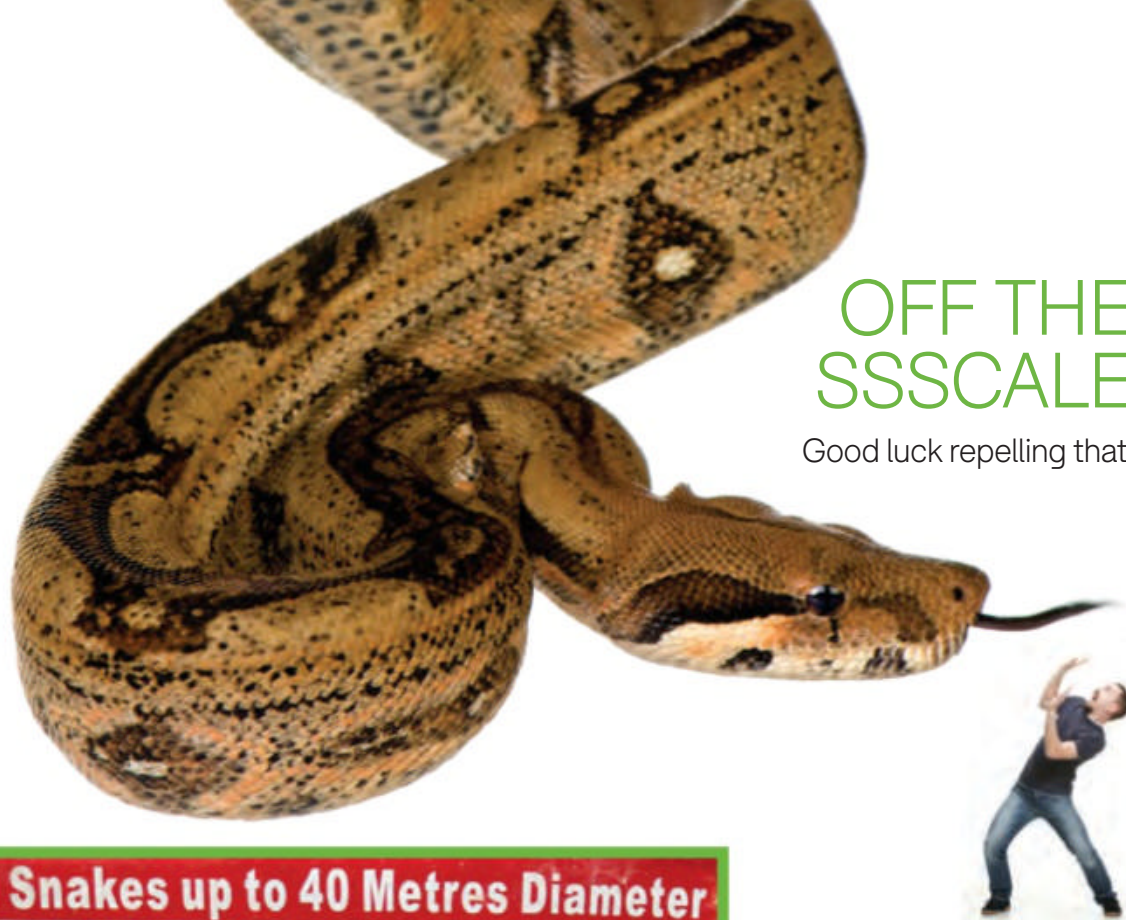


Electric vehicles

What's holding us back?



Smart meters, convection microwaves, fridges & more



Repel Snakes up to 40 Metres Diameter

LIQUID COLD

Just in case you overdo the ice.



INGREDIENTS: Sugar , vegetable creamer powder (glucose syrup , palm oil ,natri caseinate , stabilizers (340(ii) ,452(i)), emulsifiers (471, 472(e)), antifreeze (551) , iodized salt , Synthetic color used in food (160a(i)) , soluble coffee (14%) , milk cream powder (12%), (vegetable oil, glucose syrup , natri caseinate , dry substances from milk(3%), stabilizers (340(ii), 452(i)) ,emulsifiers (471,472e) , antifreeze (551) , iod supplemental salt , Synthetic color for food(160a(i))), ,athetic flavoring agent (condensed milk flavor, coffee flavor)natural food coloring agents (150a), salt , Synthetic color used in food (150b), ,sweetening(950) ,acidity regulator (500(ii)).



HARD WORD

Our long-serving rogues' gallery of dodgy ads, toe-curling typos and misadventures in marketing, as sent in by you – our tickled, angered and bewildered readers. And thanks to the timeless shonkiness of so much advertising, you're always spoilt for choice – so keep 'em coming. Email high-quality unedited photos to hardword@choice.com.au.

This month, thanks go to Chris Barnes (Liquid cold), Chris Johnson (Time to burn), Stuart Mertens (Off the sssscale) and Steve Roberts (Luncheon is served, Sir Tiddles).

Compiled by Daniel Davies

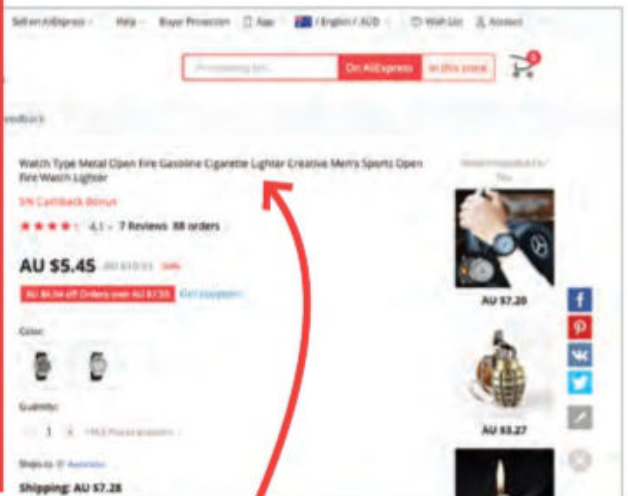
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Luxury cat food hits new heights.



TIME TO BURN...

... your eyebrows?



Watch Type Metal Open Fire Gasoline Cigarette Lighter Creative Men's Sports Open Fire Watch Lighter